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SOCIAL CREDIT AND THE PRESS: THE EARLY YEARS

by

© ROBERT C. HILL

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

of Master of Arts

Department of Political Science

Edmonton, Alberta

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Social Credit and the Press: The Early Years" submitted by Robert C. Hill in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The attempt by William Aberhart's Social Credit government to introduce a radically new economic system in Alberta in the mid-depression years encountered strong and virtually unanimous opposition among the province's daily and weekly newspapers. This opposition was bitterly resented by Aberhart and his followers, whose collective attitude was a mixture of zeal, righteousness and intolerance. The mutual hostility reached a climax in 1937, when the government brought in dual purpose legislation that would have forced newspapers to become propaganda vehicles for Social Credit and enabled the government to control press criticism and other unfavorable publicity. Social Credit claimed the Accurate News and Information Act, which was ruled ultra vires by the Supreme Court of Canada, was necessary to make newspapers print the truth about the government. While Social Credit, both as a party and government, faced solid press opposition, which it compensated for by its use of radio, the newspapers gave Albertans a factually accurate picture of administration activities. What the government intended with its legislation, it is argued here, was to silence its most determined and outspoken critic, to limit the public debate and discussion that are an integral part of the democratic system.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.
>
> --Thomas Jefferson[1]

In a general way, this paper is concerned with the role of the press in a democratic political system. Specifically, it focuses on the relationship between the Social Credit government of Alberta and the press in the mid-thirties and that government's abortive effort to regulate the province's newspapers. Under legislation introduced in 1937, the Social Credit administration attempted to make two basic changes in the operation of the Alberta press. One would have enabled the government to force its views on the public by using space commandeered from the newspapers. The second was designed to give the administration control over criticism and other unfavorable publicity. The legislation, unprecedented in modern times in the Anglo-Saxon democratic experience, would have fundamentally altered the whole concept of public discussion and debate in an open society. This paper examines and analyses both the legislation and the events leading up to it. The purpose here is to try to establish the motives behind the Social Credit attempt to interfere with the traditional free flow of information and opinion in a democratic system.

Social Credit came to power in 1935 as a radical populist party

dedicated to establishing a new economic order in a province hard hit by a devastating world-wide depression. To the movement's leader, William Aberhart, it was a puzzling paradox to find shortages and economic hardship in a region so abundantly endowed with resources. He promised to abolish what he called this poverty in the midst of plenty. Just how he proposed to do it was hazily sketched out for the voters in his Social Credit Manual (familiarly known as the Blue Manual).[2] Basically, there were three main factors in this "wondrously simple plan"--distribution of credit dividends to every Albertan, establishment of a just price for all goods and services, and provision for the continuous flow of credit.[3] Aberhart believed these three factors could be introduced into the existing system "without a very great upheaval of social, commercial or political interests," although at the same time he promised they would "effectively change the whole system in a very short space of time."[4]

The party leader may have been somewhat naive in his assessment of possible reaction to the program. At any rate, the Social Credit government's attempt to build a New Jerusalem on the dust-blown prairies soon brought it into conflict with some of the major institutions in the existing system--the federal government, banks and other members of the financial community, and the courts. And as if these formidable opponents were not enough for them, Social Crediters also decided to challenge another powerful pillar of the Canadian system, the press, and its role as an independent channel of communication between government and the people. Why the Social Credit government chose this ad-

ditional confrontation, especially at a time when it was grappling with so many serious and far more urgent problems, is one of the central questions probed in this paper.

From about the time of Confederation, freedom of the press has been pretty much taken for granted in Canada, at least in peacetime. Unlike the United States, this country has no constitutional provision guaranteeing a free press. Here the tradition of newspapers reporting and commenting on the activities of government, free from official control or interference, stems from incorporation into Canada's governmental system of many of the institutions and practices of Great Britain. When the Fathers of Confederation drew up their blueprint for the Dominion of Canada, they made no mention of the press. Presumably, however, the British North America Act was meant to cover freedom of expression when, in the preamble, it said the dominion would operate with a constitution "similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom."[5] But it was not until the Canadian Bill of Rights was adopted in 1960 that press freedom in this country was guaranteed by statute. In that bill, freedom of the press is listed as one of the fundamental freedoms that "have existed and shall continue to exist in Canada."[6]

Social Credit's challenge to the free press tradition in Canada came in 1937 when the government, led by Aberhart, passed an Act to Ensure the Publication of Accurate News and Information.[7] This measure would have compelled Alberta newspapers 1) to publish government statements to correct or amplify earlier articles, and 2) to identify, on request, the writers of articles and editorials and all persons who

supplied information for these items. The Times of London called it the "first attack on the liberty of the press in any British territory within a century."[8] The government, however, maintained the act was not an attempt to censor the press, and, in the sense of censorship as some kind of pre-publication approval, this may have been technically correct. Nevertheless the legislation would have given the government a degree of control over what Alberta newspapers published, thus effectively limiting the freedom they had previously enjoyed. Not surprisingly, the measure touched off a storm of protest in the press, not only in Alberta, but across the country, with echoes as far away as England. As it turned out, however, the Accurate News and Information Act did not receive assent and was eventually declared ultra vires by the Supreme Court of Canada, in a ruling that confirmed the tradition of a free press in this country's political structure.

That Social Credit received what is called a "bad press" is beyond question. All six dailies in Alberta and most of the weeklies strongly opposed the new movement in the 1935 provincial election, with the two largest newspapers, the Edmonton Journal and the Calgary Daily Herald, perhaps the most persistent and outspoken opponents.[9] With one major exception, this newspaper opposition continued during the first years of the Aberhart administration. The writer has not made a comparative study in the field, but it would appear Aberhart's government had more editorial abuse heaped on its head during its first three years in office than almost any other provincial administration in Canada during a corresponding period of time.[10]

The reasons for the critical and questioning attitude of the newspapers are easy enough to understand. Here was a government of political neophytes attempting to introduce a fundamentally new economic system which even the head of the government apparently did not comprehend. Aberhart's "wondrously simple plan" was neither wondrous nor simple to a great many Albertans. Their initial scepticism was only heightened by Aberhart's unwillingness or inability to clarify aspects of his program. The reluctance of the newspapers to see Alberta serve as a testing ground for what they considered a woolly and impracticable economic scheme is suggested in a comment made by the Herald after Social Credit's founder, Major C. H. Douglas, addressed members of the Alberta Legislature in 1934. Noting that Douglas believed Scotland would serve as an admirable laboratory for his theories, the newspaper said Albertans "perhaps would be safely advised to leave decision on the system to the hard-headed and canny Scots."[11] At a time when the economy was already suffering severely from the depression, the newspapers took the position that a great deal more damage could be done by an inexperienced group of reformers tinkering with the system. The press therefore questioned and criticised the Social Crediters virtually every step of the way, holding the government to account and attempting to make it justify the major measures it proposed.

This constant criticism and questioning, however, was not the reason given by the Aberhart administration for its unprecedented action against the press. Rather, the government accused the newspapers of misrepresenting its statements and policies and of publishing false

information (or "falsities," to use the term favored by the premier). It also charged that in some cases the newspapers hindered government efforts to carry through the Social Credit program.

In introducing the Accurate News and Information Act, the Social Crediters said they simply wanted to make sure the press gave an honest picture of the government and what it was doing. The very title of the legislation suggested this objective, as did the preamble, which noted the desirability of having a true and exact account of government policy presented to Albertans. Thus, officially at least, the Aberhart administration claimed it was acting from the best of motives; it was merely trying to improve the performance of Alberta newspapers. Everything was being done in the name of accuracy and truth.

This paper will argue, however, that the government's goal in legislating against the press was entirely different from what was announced officially. The thesis here is that the government sought control of the newspapers out of motives that had nothing to do with the accurate presentation of public information. Rather, it is contended, the government hoped to muffle a persistent and annoying critic. It wanted to stop, or at least keep to a minimum, the embarrassing stories and discomfiting questions that held the government up to public ridicule by exposing its weaknesses and failings. The Social Crediters did not see the press as a legitimate critic or questioner in the Alberta political system but rather as an enemy to be brought under their will.

To support this thesis the paper will attempt to show that both

Aberhart and the party he led were intolerant towards those who disagreed with them, resenting any criticism or dissent. They fervently believed that their way was the right way, if not the only way, and they reacted strongly when they encountered contrary views. Their attitude seemed to be that anyone not fully in agreement with Social Credit was a hostile opponent. Both before the 1935 election and after they came to power, Social Crediters dealt uncharitably with individuals who perceived things differently and criticised official policy. With this intolerant attitude, it was to be expected they would strike back at what they considered one of their main enemies, the press. By imposing restrictions on the newspapers, the Social Crediters sought revenge; they were getting even with an implacable foe. While acute sensitivity to criticism and a general intolerant approach were fundamental factors in the government's decision to try to interfere with the press through the Accurate News and Information Act, other elements possibly came into play as well.

As will be seen in later chapters, Social Crediters strongly believed in the value of party propaganda, and no one appreciated the need for communicating with the masses more than Aberhart. If it had not been for radio and his skilful use of that medium, it is doubtful whether the party would have achieved power in 1935. But he was also interested in using the printed word to spread the Social Credit gospel. The government had barely settled into office before arrangements were made for the party and its supporters to purchase stock in the Calgary Albertan.[12] Social Crediters were also involved in a number of other

publishing ventures--pamphlets, weeklies, and so on. Thus the idea of forcing newspapers to print messages from the government, in full and at no charge, must have strongly appealed to the party strictly in terms of propaganda.

The attacks on the press, culminating in legislation, also could indicate the Aberhart government was looking for a scapegoat. By the time the act was brought into the legislature, the government's fortunes were at a low point. It could blame the federal government and the courts for its failure to produce the promised Social Credit system, but the press was an even better scapegoat in some ways. The newspapers, arriving daily or weekly in homes throughout the province, were far more tangible enemies than the courts or a government in far-off Ottawa. By pointing an accusing finger at the press, the government perhaps hoped to divert public attention from the very real problems in Alberta and its own inability to solve them.

As for the complaints of Social Crediters against the press, supposedly the real reason for passing the Accurate News and Information Act, this thesis holds that, for the most part, they were greatly exaggerated, unsubstantiated by facts, or the result of a misconception among party followers of the function of the press in a democratic system. The newspapers were certainly outspoken in their criticism of the government, but this paper will try to show that they were also essentially fair, reporting events accurately and giving the administration ample opportunity to present and defend its programs and policies. Not the least of the government's problems was an inability,

perhaps due to lack of experience, to take advantage of the opportunities offered to deal effectively with newspaper criticism. But this shortcoming, candidly admitted by one of the administration's own advisers,[13] does not mean the press was unfair or that it was doing a poor job of telling Albertans about their government.

Surprisingly, for all that has been written about the establishment in this province of the world's first Social Credit administration--and there is a considerable collection of books and articles on the subject--not much attention has been given to the relationship between Aberhart's government and the press, apart from passing references. Mallory's work deals with Social Credit in terms of how the administration's clash with Ottawa and the courts altered the way federalism functions in this country.[14] For Macpherson, the Social Credit movement offered evidence to support his theory about the development of a different strain of democracy in this province.[15] Irving looks at press coverage during the party's successful first bid for power, but his account covers only from 1932 to 1935.[16] Certain biographies and autobiographies of Social Credit figures of the era also discuss the press but only as part of the story of a particular politician.[17]

Only one book is devoted to Social Credit and the press. In Alberta, Aberhart and Social Credit, Boudreau has compiled newspaper reports and editorials on the party and government during the years 1934 to 1938, in an attempt to show "something of the range and intensity of the debate that went on among Albertans."[18] In this useful

work, however, Boudreau does not venture into analysis or interpretation, apart from a few remarks in the introduction.

Why the press has received such little attention in the studies of Social Credit's early days in Alberta is difficult to understand. It is obvious how much importance the Aberhart government and its supporters attached to the newspapers. The very fact that legislation to control the press was introduced is proof of this. Further evidence can be found in the repeated attacks on the newspapers by the premier, his ministers and other party loyalists. Aberhart, for example, regularly complained about the press during his Sunday religious broadcasts. For Social Crediters, the press was almost an obsession.[19] The press act itself probably brought the Social Credit government more national and international attention than any other single measure it introduced. The significance of the act was underscored when the Pulitzer prize committee at Columbia University paid an unprecedented tribute to Alberta dailies and weeklies for their campaign against the legislation. A special public service prize, a bronze plaque, was awarded the Journal for its "leadership in defense of freedom of the press," and engraved certificates were given to the six dailies and ninety weeklies that participated in the campaign.[20]

The press, as part of the media, plays an important part in the political process in a democratic system. Parties strive to obtain "good coverage" of their policies and activities during an election campaign, in the belief this may have some influence on how voters mark their ballots. Between elections, both government and opposition pay

considerable attention to the media, trying to present their policies and arguments in a favorable and convincing way. In sum, the media serve as a prime means of communication between the elected (and those hoping to be elected) and the people who hold the ultimate political power, the voters. Almond and Powell make the point this way:

> The emergence of the mass media in a society provides the political elites with a tremendous potential for arousing the interest and influencing the attitudes of the citizens. By the same token, the free circulation of information through a mass media structure creates a great potential for popular action on the basis of widespread and accurate knowledge about political events.[21]

The case under study here is significant because of the breakdown in the normal interplay between press and government. Angered by the hostility of the newspapers, the government attempted to dictate new rules for publishing public information. An administration that sought drastic changes in the economic system also wanted to alter the role of a free press in the political system. The purpose in examining the relationship between Aberhart's government and the newspapers is to try to determine the reason or reasons for the 1937 press legislation. What we want to know is why the Social Crediters took such a step. Did the Alberta newspapers abuse their freedom to report and comment on public affairs, as alleged by Aberhart and his followers, and thus deserve the proposed disciplinary measures? Was the Accurate News and Information Act simply overreaction by a sensitive and somewhat artless government to a great deal of unfavorable publicity? Or did the legislation indicate something more disturbing, a trace of totalitarianism

in the Social Credit movement and its leader?

The confrontation with the press tells a good deal about the nature of the Social Credit government and its supporters. As with its attempts to alter the credit system and debt arrangements, when it faced opposition from the federal government and the financial establishment of the country, Aberhart's administration was again the "little guy" up against a big and powerful opponent when it challenged the press. As such, it may have attracted some support or sympathy as the underdog. At the same time, however, the government's action revealed the darker side of the Social Credit movement. Although Aberhart and his party had objectives which many Albertans considered praiseworthy--to improve the economic condition of a depression-weary people and to introduce a more equitable system--they appeared too zealous, too dedicated. Their thinking was rigid and closed; they saw issues and people in stark black and white terms. The press legislation showed, perhaps more vividly than any other action by the government, the narrow-minded approach of the party, the belief that those who did not share the unquestioning faith in Social Credit doctrine were enemies to be discredited or brought under control.[21] It was not lost on the newspapers of the day that an extension of this attitude could lead to the kind of control found in the Fascist regimes in Germany and Italy.

This thesis will examine in some detail the performance of the newspapers and the reaction of the Social Crediters, and analyse their respective positions. Attention will focus on two newspapers, the

Herald and the Journal, although other dailies and some weeklies will be used to illustrate a point, to make comparisons or to deal with allegations by the government. Social Crediters were fond of complaining about the press in general, but the Herald and Journal seemed to be favorite targets for Aberhart and others--whether because of their size (they were the two largest dailies in the province) or the frequency and intensity of their criticism of the government or their habit of revealing information about policy and government problems before the administration was prepared to make such information public. Whatever the reason, these two newspapers appeared to represent to Social Crediters all that was wrong with Alberta's press. That is why this paper concentrates on them.

Newspapers of the day have been a major source of material for this work. Other useful information was obtained from documents at the provincial archives. Included here were letters and papers relating to the press from the premier's office files, plus a variety of other material--Social Credit publications, reports of government agencies, and transcripts of a number of Aberhart's Sunday radio addresses, broadcast over Edmonton and Calgary stations.

The paper consists of six chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter II gives a brief account of how the free press tradition developed, with special attention to the Canadian experience. Telescoping several centuries of history into a few pages, we trace the growth and gradual acceptance of the libertarian theory of the press. The purpose of this background information is to show what was at stake

when the Aberhart administration introduced the Accurate News and Information Act. The chapter also looks at the nature of the press (its philosophy and attitudes), how the press functions in the political system and how it is perceived by politicians and governments. It will be shown that dissatisfaction with the press was not unique to Social Credit; over the years, politicians of all hues have complained about their treatment at the hands of the newspapers. What sets Aberhart apart from other leaders in democratic societies is the action he took to cope with an unfriendly press.

Chapters III and IV explore the conflict between Social Credit and the press--first in the period up to the 1935 election, then in the early years of the Aberhart administration. Here we examine the reasons for the conflict, and weigh the performance of the press--in reporting both the 1935 campaign and the first two years of the new government--against the charges levelled by Social Crediters. Included in this section is an assessment of the role played by radio and Aberhart's extensive use of that medium both before and after his election. A portion of the first of these two chapters is devoted to Aberhart's background as a teacher-principal and preacher, in an effort to show how his career before entering politics shaped his attitude towards a critical press.

Chapter V examines and analyses the Accurate News and Information Act, arguing the government was unable to justify such a measure. It will be shown that the Aberhart administration sought two separate objectives with its press legislation. One was to obtain a new and free

outlet for Social Credit propaganda by forcing newspapers to print official statements. The other was to stifle the press by intimidation and keep it from publishing the unfavorable news stories and critical editorials that were damaging the reputation of Aberhart and his government. The analysis draws in part on the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, with its emphasis on the need for free discussion of public affairs in the Canadian system of government.

A brief concluding chapter, summarizing what has gone before, argues that the evidence clearly shows the government's motives in passing the Accurate News and Information Act had little if anything to do with its professed concern about truth and accuracy in Alberta newspapers. Rather, it is contended, the government's prime motive was to bring the press under its control, hoping thereby to stop the stories and comments that were destroying its credibility.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Quoted in Press Freedoms Under Pressure: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Government and the Press (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1972), p. 5.

[2]William Aberhart, Social Credit Manual: Social Credit as Applied to the Province of Alberta (Calgary: Western Printing and Litho. Co., 1935).

[3]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[4]Ibid., p. 19.

[5]British North America Act and Amendments 1867-1948 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), p. 61.

[6]An Act for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Statutes of Canada, 1960, vol. 1, ch. 44.

[7]Alberta Legislature, 1937, Third Session. Hereafter the legislation will be called the Accurate News and Information Act.

[8]Edmonton Journal, October 4, 1937.

[9]Hereafter in the text called the Journal and the Herald.

[10]The CCF in Saskatchewan also faced a hostile press when it came to power in 1944. Free enterprise newspapers, as expected, opposed a government advocating a form of socialism. But in the Saskatchewan case, the new government and the CCF movement, were taken far more seriously than the Social Crediters in Alberta, who represented a party considered intellectually deficient.

[11]Calgary Daily Herald, April 7, 1934.

[12]Hereafter in the text called the Albertan.

[13]From the diary of John Hargrave, founder and leader of the Social Credit party of Great Britain, who briefly served as honorary Social Credit adviser to the Alberta government planning committee. Edmonton Journal, August 3, 1937.

[14]J. R. Mallory, Social Credit and the Federal Power in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1954).

[15]C. B. Macpherson, Democracy in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953).

[16]John A. Irving, The Social Credit Movement in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959).

[17]See Alfred J. Hooke, 30 + 5: I Know, I Was There (Edmonton: Co-Op Press Ltd., 1971); L. P. V. Johnson and Ola MacNutt, Aberhart and Alberta (Edmonton: Co-Op Press Ltd., 1970).

[18]Joseph A. Boudreau, Alberta, Aberhart and Social Credit (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Ltd., 1975), p. 1.

[19]This interpretation is not shared by Senator Ernest Manning, probably Aberhart's closest cabinet colleague and the man who succeeded him as premier in 1943. In an interview in Ottawa on June 21, 1977, he said press coverage of the Aberhart administration in the thirties was "no great issue, as far as we were concerned--we had a lot more important things to worry about than what the press had to say."

[20]New York Times, May 3, 1938. This was the first Pulitzer award ever given to a newspaper outside the United States. In an editorial, the New York Times commented: "Newspapers and all friends of freedom of the press have a special pleasure in the honor bestowed upon the Edmonton Journal and other newspapers that fought manfully and successfully the efforts of the Government in Mr. Aberhart's Alberta to choke the opposition press." Ibid., May 4, 1938.

[21]Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1966), p. 170.

[22]The kind of intolerance displayed by Social Crediters existed in Alberta long before Aberhart came to power, but among the same group of people who made up the core of the movement. When the United Farmers of Alberta took office in 1921, a UFA group in Hanna started a boycott against the Hanna Herald, which had strongly opposed the farmers' party in the election. Jean Burnet, Next Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), pp. 82-83.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT OF A FREE PRESS

> The conflict between the men who make and the men who report the news is as old as time. News may be true, but it is not the truth, and reporters and officials seldom see it the same way....In the old days, the reporters or couriers of bad news were often put to the gallows; now they are given the Pulitzer Prize, but the conflict goes on.
>
> --James Reston[1]

The basic issue to be resolved in the confrontation between Aberhart's administration and Alberta newspapers was whether the press would be allowed to continue to operate free from government interference. In passing the Accurate News and Information Act, Social Credit attempted to impose regulations on the press that would have severely restricted the traditional open debate and discussion in a democratic society. To put the Alberta case in perspective, this chapter traces the development of newspapers from their original role as subservient creatures of the state to their present position as independent and frequently hostile critics of authority. The focus here is on the libertarian theory of the press, which sees newspapers as an important element in the general debate on public issues. Social Crediters, it will be shown, were not alone in finding fault with the performance of newspapers under this libertarian approach. The chapter also discusses the role of the press in a democratic system and how the press is perceived by politicians, who are sometimes tempted to bring it under their control.

Like so many of this country's institutions, Canada's free press tradition draws heavily on the British pattern, which, in turn, slowly developed after a protracted struggle against government control and licensing. Initially, a very tight rein was kept on all printing to ensure that what was published reflected the official view of church or state. This method of control, which belongs to what has been called the authoritarian theory of the press, developed in the late Renaissance period.

> In that society, truth was conceived to be, not the product of the great mass of people, but of a few wise men who were in a position to guide and direct their fellows. Thus truth was thought to be centered near the center of power. The press therefore functioned <u>from the top down</u>. The rulers of the time used the press to inform the people of what the rulers thought they should support...Only by special permission was private ownership of the press permitted, and this permission could be withdrawn any time the obligation to support the royal policies was considered to have been dishonored.[2]

While modern theory sees a valuable role for the press in reporting, explaining and critically examining government activities, the early system of patents and licences was designed to keep the press from looking too closely or too critically at what the rulers were doing. Rivers and Schramm point out that since those persons with a licence to print enjoyed a monopoly or other benefits, they were quite likely to publish what their rulers wanted to see.[3] Also to be considered, of course, was what might happen to them if they published unlicensed material:

> In the reign of Charles II a printer's right hand was slowly burned off, he was then disembowelled and hung [<u>sic</u>]. Finally

> his head was cut off--all sanctions designed to discourage the rapid growth of free editorial opinion.[4]

Thus, during its first two hundred years, printing served primarily as "another tool to promote unity and continuity within the state."[5] Initially, control rested with the crown. But by the middle of the seventeenth century, Parliament, having slowly acquired more freedom of expression itself, assumed the task of regulating what was printed. The restrictive viewpoint prevalent during the period is conveyed in the words of one state licenser, who said he opposed a public newspaper because it

> ...makes the Multitude too Familiar with the Actions, and Counsels of their Superiors; too Pragmaticall and Censorious, and gives them, not only an Itch, but a kind of Colourable Right and License, to be meddling with Government.[6]

It was not until about the middle of the seventeenth century, after the Star Chamber was abolished, that the first regular reports of events in Parliament began to appear. Even in those early days, politicians took strong exception to what was written about them. Samuel Pecke, one of the first journalists to report events at Westminister, was jailed twice for the interpretation he gave to certain speeches. The meaning was all too clear. From his punishment, as well as the harsh penalties imposed on other reporters and printers for similar offences, "it became evident that Parliament, too, had little use for a free press."[7]

One of the strongest and most eloquent attacks against publishing restrictions in this early period came from Milton, who encountered

Puritan censorship when, deserted by his wife after a few weeks of marriage, he published pamphlets defending an individual's right to seek a divorce. Milton appealed to Parliament, urging freedom on the grounds that truth would emerge.

> And though all the windes of doctrin were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falshood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the wors, in a free and open encounter.[8]

Milton's plea was followed a few years later by a petition from the Levellers, who recommended that Parliament revoke all ordinances against free printing.

> ...if Government be just in its Constitution, and equal in its distributions, it will be good, if not absolutely necessary for them, to hear all voices and judgments, which they can never do, but by giving freedome to the Press....[9]

But this kind of thinking was far ahead of its time. It took several centuries for the authoritarian theory of the press to fade away in England. Prior censorship was eventually abandoned not because of any change in attitude towards press freedom but simply because the sheer volume of published material became too cumbersome to check. By the end of the seventeenth century, licensing was ended, a milestone event in the history of the freedom of the press. But once authorities gave up these kinds of pre-publication control, they tried to hold the press in check with punishment after publication, imposing harsh libel and sedition laws. Again there was a long struggle before things improved; it was not until well into the nineteenth century that truth

was accepted as a defence in British libel cases.[10]

As authoritarian control weakened, there gradually took shape a wholly new concept of the press, based on the liberal approach to man and his role in society. Thanks in large part to the Enlightenment, which challenged authority in certain fields and stressed reason and freedom, man came to be viewed as a rational being who could search out truth for himself rather than depend on what was dictated to him by the rulers. The press was considered part of this search for truth, presenting different viewpoints and arguments on government and other aspects of the contemporary scene. Thus developed the libertarian theory, in which the underlying purpose of the press was

> ...to help discover truth, to assist in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manner of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions. The essential characteristic of this process was its freedom from government controls or domination.[11]

There is no suggestion in this theory that the press was to replace the authorities as the source of all truth. Rather, says Siebert, the idea here was to expose the public to a great deal of information and opinion, some of it possibly true, some possibly false, and some a mixture of both. Ultimately, the public could be trusted to "discard that not in the public interest and to accept that which served the needs of the individual and of the society of which he is a part."[12] As for the state, its chief function was to "maintain a stable framework within which the free forces of individualism... (might) interact."[13]

This libertarian approach did not suddenly blossom during one warm summer of Enlightenment. Rather it evolved over centuries, as man himself sought greater personal liberty, a fuller opportunity to shape his own life and to develop his personality. Descartes, who believed so strongly in the power of human reason, was one of the first philosophers to establish guidelines for this new approach. In England, Locke was a central figure, holding that ultimate sovereignty lay with the people. His theories

> ...eventually penetrated the deeply ingrained attitude of the government toward the press, and for the first time in English history the phrase "freedom of the press" acquired a respectable as well as a concrete meaning.[14]

By the end of the eighteenth century, several members of Parliament and others had banded together in support of free expression, adopting a resolution that asserted liberty of the press was a "right inseparable from the Principles of a free government, and essential to the security of the British constitution."[15] At the same time, Erskine argued the case in court. Defending Thomas Paine, charged with seditious libel for The Rights of Man, Erskine said the proposition he wished to maintain as the basis of liberty of the press was

> ...that every man, not intending to mislead, but seeking to enlighten others with what reason and conscience, however erroneously, have dictated to him as truth, may address himself to the universal reason of a whole nation, either upon the subject of governments in general, or upon that of our own particular country....[16]

In the mid-nineteenth century, Mill added his eloquent voice to the

cause. Attacking censorship in his essay On Liberty, he said the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that

> ...it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.[17]

In the words of both Milton and Mill we see one of the essential elements of the libertarian concept, the notion of exchanging views, of testing opinions by subjecting them to other opinions--the so-called free market place of ideas. As people gradually extended their freedom and ultimately attained, through the vote, the power to govern themselves, it was only natural that government would come to be closely examined, discussed and criticised in this market place. The press contributed to the debate by helping to supply information and opinions.

The libertarian theory found the political climate particularly congenial in the United States, where freedom of the press was considered so essential to the democratic system that it was one of the liberties guaranteed in the First Amendment to the newly-drafted Constitution. The First Amendment, said Hand, "presupposes that "right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues than through any kind of authoritarian selection."[18] To Americans, a free press was seen as another check on the power of government.

The theory of the Founding Fathers was that the press should

> be the watchman on the walls, that power corrupts, and the more power there is, the more there should be an outside skeptical eye watching the operations of the men who exercise power.[19]

As for Canada, Kesterton traces the development of freedom of the press in this country through four distinct time periods.[20] From 1752 to 1807 in British North America, the press played a subservient role in the political system. (The period covers the establishment of newspapers in what eventually became Canada's six most easterly provinces, beginning with the Halifax Gazette, which appeared in 1752.) Relying heavily on government support of one kind or another, newspapers rarely took issue with the ruling authorities.

Between 1807 and 1859, the gains made in press freedom were the "accompaniment of the new spirit of vigorous independence which animated the responsible government movement."[21] Newspapers began to challenge the right of authorities to dictate what could or could not be published. But there were no gains without pain--physical, mental and financial. Editors and publishers were jailed or fined, presses were smashed and, in one case, type was thrown into Lake Ontario.[22] This period saw the initial development in Canada of the libertarian theory of the press, with its emphasis on the need for all kinds of viewpoints and opinion in solving problems and discovering truth. The basic belief was that man, as a rational being, could be trusted to make a judicious choice from the views and arguments presented--what became known as the self-righting process.

Although freedom from government control or interference is an

integral part of the libertarian theory, it has always been recognized that the press, like the ordinary citizen, must be subject to some restrictions. Generally, the belief has been that effective safeguards are provided by a nation's laws. In dealing with this subject, Blackstone held that a free press was "essential to the nature of a free state"; but this meant freedom from pre-publication restraints, not freedom from punishment if criminal matter were published.[23] Every free man can express his views, but "if he publishes what is improper, mischievous, or illegal, he must take the consequences of his own temerity...."[24] Nobody, says Thomsom, declares that the press has any absolute right to publish what it chooses to print:

> The privileges of newspapers are subject to the same laws that prohibit any public dissemination of malicious libel, falsehoods or obscenity....On the other hand, it is fundamental to the continuance of political liberty that there should be the right to express opinions and to advocate views which, however distasteful to the government in power, are nevertheless honestly held and decently proclaimed.[25]

In Canada, development of legal controls marked the third period described by Kesterton, from 1858 to 1900, with the adoption and amendment of libel legislation by both national and provincial governments. These laws "gave some certainty to the limits of freedom and licence within which Canadian journalism...(could) function."[26]

It was during the fourth period, from 1900 to 1967 (when Kesterton's book was published), that the libertarian theory of the press came into full bloom.[27] Press censorship and licensing belonged to the past. Now control of the press was to rest in the "sense of responsib-

ility of the journalist and the due process of law."[28] At the core of the theory was the idea of a free press--the belief that every man and woman would be better off if the transmission of fact and opinion were left free from government intervention, thus making freedom of information "an essential part of any system of democracy."[29]

The theory was well established by the time Aberhart's Social Credit party assumed power in Alberta. But not everyone was satisfied with the way the theory worked in practice. Some people, whatever their views on the role of newspapers in a democratic system, claimed that freedom of the press was abused. In their view, this freedom was really a licence to report news falsely, to misrepresent, to criticise unfairly. Ferguson detected a "growing spirit of cynicism and distrust about the newspapers entering our homes," an attitude he suggested was the result of the "basic distrust of a democracy of any concentration of power."[30] In the United States, criticism of the press "increased in force and intensity" in the twentieth century, with concern over publishers propagating their own views on political and economic matters at the expense of opposing opinions.[31] Ickes charged that too often the position taken by the press on questions involving social reform and fundamental human rights of the great mass of people was "dictated by narrowly financial rather than by public considerations."[32] He claimed the general failure of the American press to treat great issues fairly and honestly was particularly evident in the fields of politics and economics.

Aberhart and a good number of his supporters were among those dis-

satisfied with the press performance, using their complaints as justification for efforts to give the government some control over what was published in the newspapers. In a CBC radio address on "The Freedom of the Press," Aberhart said no one could deny the tremendous power of the press for good or ill, but he noted that fire, which had a similar kind of power, needed to be carefully controlled.[33] The question to be decided was not whether the press should be free, but rather was freedom of the press "properly conducted in its regular channels."[34] At another point the premier said examination of some of the popular cries for freedom and liberty would show that too often they were "cries for privilege, lawlessness and gangsterdom."[35] Aberhart's complaints about Alberta newspapers, as well as the actual performance of the press in reporting the Social Credit movement and government, will be examined in a later chapter. But to understand the press attitude towards Social Credit, to appreciate the reasons for the underlying hostility, it is necessary to study another aspect of the development of newspapers.

Over the years, while struggling to throw off the controls of government, newspapers in such western democratic countries as Britain, United States and Canada, became very much a part of the free enterprise system. Long after licensing was removed, some newspapers remained instruments of government by accepting financial support. Even the prestigious Times of London was not above taking money from a government in return for editorial support.[36] In Canada, the practice continued into the early 1930s, with Prime Minister R. B. Bennett paying off the deficits of a Western daily.[37] But most newspapers had to make their

own way, relying on what their readers paid per copy and the revenue received from the sale of advertising space.

Like others in the market place, newspaper proprietors turned out a product and hoped to make a profit in return. They succeeded or failed according to their ability to meet the needs of the market--that is, to provide people with a newspaper they wanted to read. Thus, as Ferguson says, a newspaper's business practices and its attention to both solvency and profit became "indistinguishable from the practices of any other segment of a private enterprise world."[38] With the growth of circulation and the heavy costs involved in publishing, newspapers became big business and, not unnaturally, publishers began to think as businessmen. This led to the establishment of a "sympathetic bond between newspapers and other branches of business."[39] Newspapers, after all, relied on other businesses for advertising revenue; what was good for those businesses was also good for the newspapers.

Along with this business outlook, newspapers have also tended to adopt a conservative political philosophy. Porter says they support the status quo over a "wide range of social and economic policy."[40] Presumably, if a newspaper succeeds in the free enterprise system, its owners do not want to see that system changed. The press, therefore, is "certainly not among the first to advocate social changes and economic reforms."[41]

The bond with business and this conservative viewpoint made it almost inevitable that Alberta newspapers would be extremely sceptical of the Social Credit movement, with its radical plans for changing the

economic system and its attacks on big business. As for Aberhart and his followers, scepticism about the Social Credit scheme was anathema. Thus the stage was set for confrontation.

The relationship between the press and government in a democratic system does not follow any one pattern. It is often said, especially in the United States, that the press and government are adversaries. The concept of newspapers serving as an arm of government, of being subservient to authorities, has not been part of the American experience. Washington, for example, charged the press with "wilful and malignant misrepresentation,"[42] while his successor accused newspapers of "narrow bigotry...most base, vulgar, sordid scurrility."[43] Godkin says the two principal functions of the press are supplying the news and criticising the government ("the incessant, vigilant, remorseless turning over, day by day, of the acts of men in power").[44]

This adversary theory, however, does not hold true in all cases, and Canada has seen some notable departures from it. It is extremely doubtful, for instance, that an adversary relationship existed between the Liberal government in Saskatchewan and the newspapers in that province which were directly or indirectly subsidized by the government during its twenty-four years in power between 1905 and 1929.[45] This kind of arrangement may be what Rivers had in mind when he wrote that in certain cases the press and government have been "such sweethearts that much of the press has been incorporated into the machinery of power."[46] At the beginning of the century, most newspapers in Canada clearly identified themselves as Conservative, Liberal or Re-

form,[47] and this commitment meant they generally were on friendly terms with politicians belonging to the party they supported. An adversary relationship presumably existed only when another party governed. Over the years this identification with party gradually became less pronounced; conscious of the need to maintain maximum circulation, publishers wished to avoid alienating that section of the population favoring another party. In general, the press-government relationship in a democracy is an uneasy one. When newspapers are serious about their responsibilities, they follow the activities of government with a suspicious vigilance. For their part, governments and politicians, as we shall see, have their own reasons for keeping a close watch on the press. One study concluded that friction between the two is inevitable.[48]

The attitude of governments and politicians toward the press is shaped to a great extent by their perception of the media as a major channel of communication to the public and what this means in terms of influencing public opinion. Understandably, politicians and governments want the flow of information to the public to be favorable to their own cause. They therefore resent being criticised or having their shortcomings and mistakes revealed to the very people on whom they rely for electoral support. Because the media are so political, authorities "seek to regulate and control them for their own advantage."[49] The Commission on the Freedom of the Press put it this way:

> Every modern government, liberal or otherwise, has a specific position in...(the) field of ideas; its stability is vulnerable to critics in proportion to their ability and persuasiveness.

> A government resting on popular suffrage is no exception to this rule. It also may be tempted--just because public opinion is a factor in official livelihood--to manage the ideas and images entering public debate.[50]

The Accurate News and Information Act was Social Credit's attempt to manage the ideas and images entering public debate. Other efforts to manipulate the media in democratic systems are not difficult to find, although in most cases they are much less extreme and far more subtle than the Social Credit legislation. Recent American presidents--Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon--were accused of trying to "manage" the news. In Canada, a Liberal MP said the Trudeau government was trying to "domesticate" and "harness" the press in this country.[51]

Under totalitarian rule, the management of information takes extreme forms. The press in Russia is an instrument of government, a "collective propagandist, collective agitator...collective organizer."[52] Official "truth" is published by Pravda, organ of the Communist party, and Izvestiya, published under the authority of the Supreme Soviet. Fascist governments are also careful about what information reaches the public; both Hitler and Mussolini brought the respective newspapers of Germany and Italy under government control. The Italian dictator considered Fascist journalism as his "orchestra."[53] With its Accurate News and Information Act, the Aberhart government seemed to be moving in this direction.

Social Credit's experience with a hostile press is not unique in North American politics, as will be seen in the next chapter. What sets the Aberhart administration apart from other governments in Can-

ada and the United States is the action it took to cope with unfriendly newspapers. Aberhart's attempt to regulate the press and thus control what was published about his administration tells a great deal about his sensitivity to criticism, his intolerance and the intolerance of his followers. If it had not been for this sensitivity and intolerance, it seem improbable that the Aberhart administration would have felt compelled to bring in its press legislation. The 1935 election proved the party did not need press support to succeed at the polls, and Manning says the government "certainly had no concern about the press from the standpoint of its political effect."[54] Therefore, the explanation for the Accurate News and Information Act appears to lie in the kind of man Aberhart was and in the attitude of his followers. The next two chapters will explore this further.

FOOTNOTES

[1]James Reston, The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on American Foreign Policy (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 3.

[2]Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1963), pp. 2-3.

[3]William L. Rivers and Wilbur Schramm, Responsibility in Mass Communication, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 32.

[4]George V. Ferguson, "Freedom of the Press," in George V. Ferguson and F. H. Underhill, Press and Party in Canada: Issues of Freedom (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1955), p. 2.

[5]Rivers, Schramm, Responsibility, p. 33.

[6]John Hohenberg, Free Press/Free People: The Best Cause (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 25.

[7]Ibid., p. 23.

[8]John Milton, "Areopagitica; for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing," in The Works of John Milton, vol. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 347.

[9]Frederick Seaton Siebert, Freedom of the Press in England 1476-1776 (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1952), p. 201.

[10]W. H. Kesterton, A History of Journalism in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1967), p. 58.

[11]Fred S. Siebert, "The Libertarian Theory of the Press," in Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, Four Theories, p. 51.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., p. 53.

[14]Siebert, Freedom of the Press, p. 364.

[15]Stephen Parks, ed., The Friends to the Liberty of the Press: Eight Tracts 1792-1793 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), p. 3.

[16]Stephen Parks, ed., The Speeches of the Hon. Thomas Erskine (Now Lord Erskine) When at the Bar, on Subjects Connected with the Liberty of the Press 1810, vol. 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), pp. 95-96.

[17]John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (London: Watts & Co., 1929), p. 20.

[18]Judge Learned Hand, quoted in Hohenberg, Free Press, p. 498.

[19]James Reston, quoted in George R. Berdes, Friendly Adversaries: The Press and Government (Marquette University College of Journalism: Center for the Study of the American Press, 1969), p. 88.

[20]Kesterton, History of Journalism.

[21]Ibid., p. 20.

[22]Destruction of the press and type at William Lyon Mackenzie's York newspaper, the Colonial Advocate, on June 8, 1826, was carried out by fifteen young men whose parents were members of the Family Compact. At least two officials stood by and watched while the equipment was destroyed in retaliation for Mackenzie's recent attacks on leading members of the Compact. However, Mackenzie, whose newspaper had been having financial difficulties, was awarded damages by a jury in excess of his loss, enabling him to pay off old debts and buy new press equipment.

[23]Sir William Blackstone, quoted in Siebert "Libertarian Theory," p. 49.

[24]Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[25]J. S. Thomson, "Freedom of the Press," in The Dalhousie Review, vol. 17 (1937-38) p. 511.

[26]Kesterton, History of Journalism, p. 57.

[27]Kesterton appears to have arbitrarily fixed the start of the fourth period at 1900, perhaps simply because it marks the beginning of a century.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ferguson, "Freedom of the Press," p. 1.

[30]G. V. Ferguson, "Have We Got, Can We Keep, Freedom of the Press?," in Saturday Night, vol. 63, no. 26 (April 3, 1948), p. 6.

[31]Theodore Peterson, "The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press," in Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, Four Theories, p. 78.

[32]William L. Chenery, Freedom of the Press (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955), p. 159.

[33]From a transcript of the broadcast, June 5, 1937. Edmonton Journal files.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ferguson, "Freedom of the Press," p. 3.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid., p. 4.

[39]Carlton McNaught, Canada Gets the News (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1940), p. 35.

[40]John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 484.

[41]Chenery, Freedom of the Press, p. 160.

[42]Olga G. Hoyt and Edwin P. Hoyt, Freedom of the News Media (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 70.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Edwin Lawrence Godkin, "Criticism of Government," in Frank Luther (ed.), Interpretations of Journalism: A Book of Readings (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1937), p. 122.

[45]C. H. Higginbotham, Off the Record: The CCF in Saskatchewan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), p. 20.

[46]William L. Rivers, The Adversaries: Politics and the Press (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 9.

[47]McNaught, Canada Gets the News, p. 20.

[48]Press Freedoms Under Pressure; Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Government and the Press (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1972), p. 6.

[49]F. C. Engelmann and Mildred A. Schwartz, Canadian Political Parties: Origin, Character, Impact (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1975), p. 119.

[50]Commission on Freedom of the Press, "The Problem and the Principles of Freedom and Responsibility," in Harold L. Nelson (ed.),

Freedom of the Press From Hamilton to the Warren Court (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1967), p. 393.

[51]Serge Joyal, MP for Rosemount Maisonneuve, quoted in the Toronto Globe and Mail, June 6, 1977.

[52]Rivers and Schramm, Responsibility, p. 42.

[53]Hohenberg, Free Press/Free People, p. 219.

[54]Interview, June 21, 1977.

CHAPTER III

THE 1935 CAMPAIGN

> Don't let articles in the newspapers condemning Social Credit influence you, as these papers are but the mouthpieces of the capitalistic system.
>
> --Social Crediter Mrs. Edith Gostick[1]

> ...a vote cast for Social Credit will be a vote cast for chaos, confusion and bankruptcy; a vote for disappointment.
>
> --Editorial, Calgary Albertan[2]

The 1935 provincial election was a triumph for Social Credit. More that fifty-four per cent of Alberta voters who turned out in record numbers on that sunny twenty-second day of August left little doubt about their preference for William Aberhart and thus, implicitly, for his new economic scheme. Social Credit won fifty-six of the sixty-three seats in the provincial legislature. Of the remaining seven seats, five went to the Liberals and two to the Conservatives. The United Farmers of Alberta party, which had held power since 1921, failed to win a single constituency.

In achieving such an impressive victory, Aberhart's party[3] overcame some daunting handicaps:

1. Although the leader and key aides had preached Social Credit doctrine throughout the province for two years, the party had been in existence as a formal political organization for only four-and-one-half months; its founding convention was held in April in Calgary.

2. Aberhart, several top associates and virtually all the Social

Credit candidates were political novices, with no experience in political campaigning.[4]

3. Social Credit faced nearly unanimous opposition, some of it extremely bitter, from the six daily newspapers in the province and most of the weeklies.

The third point, press opposition, is the principal concern of this chapter. Here we examine the position adopted by the newspapers and discuss several reasons why the Alberta press treated Social Credit with suspicion and even hostility--including concern over what the party's proposals might do to the economy, an uneasiness about the intolerance shown by Aberhart and his supporters, and a general belief that the party was both anti-establishment and anti-intellectual. The chapter also explores the reaction of Aberhart and his followers to the press opposition. It is argued that the leader's dogmatic approach and sensitivity to criticism can be traced to his earlier careers in the classroom and pulpit, where he did not have to contend with dissent and probing questions. Another section assesses press coverage of the 1935 campaign and compares the reaction of Social Credit with that of other parties which have had to contend with strong newspaper opposition. Lastly, reasons are offered for the failure of the massive newspaper opposition to stop Aberhart's drive for power, with special attention to the role played by radio and the Social Credit leader's masterful use of that medium.

To understand Social Credit's early appeal, it is necessary to recall the conditions of the time. According to the Report of the Royal

Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, Alberta suffered less during the depression than the other two prairie provinces, but the picture here was still bleak.

> The incidence of ruinously low prices...was perhaps more severe than elsewhere. Owing to the more recent development of Alberta, fixed debt charges were relatively higher than in any other province. In addition, farmers had not had time to become as well established. Under these circumstances, the drastic fall in prices of agricultural products produced a relatively greater strain on the farming industry and on governments. Alberta's depression problem was more one of debt and high overhead costs than...of widespread destitution.[5]

To many Albertans, Social Credit, with its pledge of a monthly dividend to pay for the necessities of life, offered a ray of hope in the pervasive economic gloom of the period. One rural newspaper said support for Aberhart was due in large part to "dissatisfaction of people over the general conditions of life."[6] After five years of depression which had taken the resiliency out of human nature and raised doubts about whether better times would ever return, people believed the established economic system had failed and were "seeking new formulaes [sic] and inspiration from other sources."[7] To some, Aberhart was a savior. One woman wrote to the Herald:

> Just as God chose Moses to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, so we firmly believe God has also ordained Mr. Aberhart a second Moses, who will lead the people of Alberta into a better and higher standard of life and into their rightful heritage.[8]

Another woman admitted she did not understand the fine points of the proposed system, but "if Mr. Aberhart says it is so, I am sure every-

thing will be all right."[9]

This unquestioning trust in Aberhart and his Social Credit cure for the province's economic ills was not shared by the Alberta newspapers. Instead of accepting Aberhart's work as gospel, as most of his followers apparently did, the press was highly sceptical and, in many cases, critical of the Social Credit scheme from the moment the party was recognized as a serious new force in Alberta politics. In turn, Social Crediters, infused with a righteous missionary zeal, resented the press attitude, seeing in it further evidence of the malignant financial forces they believed responsible for the country's grim economic condition. This mutual dislike and distrust increased as the 1935 campaign progressed.

What should be noted first of all about the press opposition to Social Credit is that it cut across all ideological and other differences among the newspapers in the province. Publications which had traditionally differed along Liberal-Conservative lines suddenly found themselves on the same side in opposing this radical new third force in Alberta politics. The Herald and the Journal, for example, had staunchly sypported the Conservative cause from the earliest days of provincehood, albeit without much success. The Edmonton Bulletin[10] and the Albertan, on the other hand, loyally backed the Liberals. All four initially opposed the "class government" (a term favored by each of the newspapers) of the UFA, but by 1930 both the Bulletin and the Albertan were calling for the fusion of the UFA and Liberal parties. In 1935, the four again found common cause against Social Credit. But

the opposition to Aberhart went beyond newspapers which supported the old line parties. The weekly Alberta Labor News, which as the voice of organized labor in the province might be expected to favor radical changes in the economic system, was as critical as the "capitalist press" of Aberhart's plan to reshape the Alberta system. City and country were also of one voice. Although they served different markets and had essentially different viewpoints, the weekly newspapers in the small centres and the city dailies were in accord over the new movement and its leader.

The point here is that the press opposition to Social Credit was not an isolated phenomenon, limited to one area or one group. It spanned the province. And it was found in newspapers of all sizes and all shades of political coloring. This hardly can be considered a freak coincidence or the result of a nefarious plot by newspaper proprietors. Rather, it seems to point to serious weaknesses in the Social Credit scheme that many Albertans failed to see or chose to overlook in their desperate desire to escape from the hardship and anguish of the depression.

Social Credit was primarily an economic philosophy, and it was on economic grounds that the press concentrated its attack, although other aspects of the program were also criticised, as was the leader himself. Aberhart had no difficulty persuading his followers that a Social Credit administration would somehow create new wealth to provide monthly dividends of credit for every Albertan, and it was the promise of such dividends that attracted so many people to the new party.[11]

But to the province's newspapers the scheme lacked credibility. The Journal said the Social Credit plan was "founded on economic fallacies,"[12] while the Alberta Labor News called it "hocus-pocus"[13] and a "crazy credit scheme."[14] The whole plan, said a rural weekly, "reads like a fairy tale."[15]

While Social Credit supporters apparently did not give much thought to where the money for the credit dividends would come from, the newspapers believed the scheme could only be financed through massive taxation. In the Social Credit Manual, Aberhart warned that recovery of money to finance the dividends must not become a "gigantic scheme of taxation."[16] Yet clearly that was what the Social Credit program required, except that Aberhart carefully avoided the offensive word "tax" and instead said the government would collect a "levy" from producers and distributors. The Journal estimated the necessary taxation would be nearly ten times the revenue the province was then receiving from all sources.[17] There was general agreement in the press that the farmer, as the major producer in an economy heavily dependent on agriculture, would be forced to carry the biggest share of the Social Credit levy. The Hanna Herald warned farmers of a "rude awakening" if the Aberhart plan were attempted.[18] The same kind of message was carried by the city dailies. Although not as concerned as the rural newspapers about farm problems, they probably realized Aberhart's support was strong in the rural areas of the province.

One of the factors contributing to newspaper scepticism over Social Credit was Aberhart's refusal to spell out details of his program. In-

itially, he talked in vague terms about creating money out of the end of a fountain pen, or relied on a simplistic analogy, likening the proposed credit scheme and money flow to the human circulatory system. When questioned, he either refused to answer or merely tried to assure his listeners that the system would work. But this did not convince the newspapers. Doubts would persist, said the Bulletin in the middle of the campaign, until the leader explained "a good deal more clearly than he has yet done."[19] As the election approached it became clear that Aberhart did not in fact have a step-by-step plan for implementing Social Credit. He told voters that they really did not have to understand Social Credit to vote for it, and promised the government would hire experts to put the scheme into operation. This, said the Herald, was a case of the blind leading the blind, with Aberhart trying to make voters believe that "in some future time some unknown body of 'experts' may be able to produce a 'plan' of social credit out of a hat."[20]

There was also the question of the legality of Aberhart's proposal. When the movement's founder, Major C. H. Douglas, was questioned by the legislature's Agricultural Committee in 1934, he expressed doubts as to whether his plan could be put into operation by a government lacking sovereign power. For their part, the newspapers were sure the division of powers under the British North America Act would not allow a province to tamper with the money system and currency, fields assigned exclusively to the federal government. The Journal suggested the only way a province could obtain the necessary power to carry out

the Social Credit program would be to withdraw from Confederation.[21]

Economic and constitutional considerations aside, the press had other reasons for disliking Social Credit and its leader. One of the most disturbing aspects of the party was its stern, frequently hostile, attitude towards those who criticised or held contrary views. As early as April, shortly after the party's founding convention, Aberhart began urging followers to cancel their subscriptions to the Herald. (He avoided using the term "boycott," but that is what he actually was promoting.) He charged the newspaper was misrepresenting the Social Credit movement, although in its extensive coverage of the Calgary convention, the Herald devoted two-and-one-half columns to a verbatim text of Aberhart's address, and published as well the texts of resolutions and the ten-point party platform. Undoubtedly, however, it was the unfavorable editorial comment in the newspaper that provoked Aberhart.

Confronted by questioners at campaign meetings, Aberhart sometimes called on the chairman to conclude the session hastily. Other times he urged the audience to "howl down" the questioner.[22] He did not want the Social Credit scheme discussed or debated; there was one official line, and no supporter was to stray from it.

> ...Mr. Aberhart has been heard on more than one occasion to publicly warn his speakers against...discussion. He has threatened over the radio to "disqualify" those of his speakers who persist in entering into debates or discussion with opponents...his speakers have been heard to reply to a question from the audience with the statement: "I am not here to answer questions. I have said what I was told to say and that is all I am here to do."[23]

Support for Social Credit turned into an intolerant frenzy, and it became virtually impossible to reason with the faithful. Abuse was heaped on those who dared to raise questions or express different views. All who stood against the Social Credit plan were "Yellow dogs."[24] A group established to oppose the party, the Economic Safety League (ESL), was branded by one Social Crediter as the "Elevated Soiety of Lunatics."[25] The leader himself set the tone for such slurs, referring to the United Farm Women of Alberta as the "Undernourished Fool Women of Alberta"--a remark he repeatedly apologized for later.[26]

As one of the main forces of opposition, the press came under frequent fire. No attempt was made to answer the points raised in editorials or to argue the Social Credit case rationally. Instead, the newspapers were ridiculed as the tools of the money barons, as the mouthpieces of the despised ruling clique, the "Fifty Big Shots." When reporters took their places at the press table at Social Credit campaign meetings, they were booed and jeered by the hostile crowd.

During the 1935 campaign the minds of Social Crediters seemed to snap shut like steel doors. These people simply did not want to hear anything but the gospel according to Aberhart. The prevailing attitude among the faithful can be seen in a pledge proposed by the party's weekly newspaper, the Alberta Social Credit Chronicle. It said in part:

> I pledge myself to discontinue to listen in any way, shape or form to propaganda, radio or newspaper, which are [sic] poisoning our minds and are opposed to Social Credit....[27]

Even the party's leader thought this was going a bit too far and disapproved of supporters using a chain letter containing the pledge, although the spirit of the pledge was entirely in keeping with his own intolerant efforts to eliminate discussion and debate.

Aberhart's attitude and tactics were vaguely worrying to the press, suggesting as they did a totalitarian cast of mind. Again it is necessary to recall the era. In 1935 two European dictators were very much in the news--Benito Mussolini in Italy, whose army was poised for the autumn invasion of Ethiopia, and Adolf Hitler, who was covetously eyeing the territory around his country and preparing for war. Hitler had come to power only two years earlier, climaxing a campaign that proved his oratorical skill in manipulating crowds and his ruthlessness in dealing with opponents and dissenters.

Aberhart was also a spellbinding speaker who knew how to play on the emotions of his audiences. As well, he could not tolerate criticism or contrary views. The newspapers were quick to point out what they perceived as similarities in the approaches of the two men. When Aberhart attempted to get his followers to boycott the Herald, the newspaper said he had invoked a most dangerous precedent and given the people a "foretaste of the Hitlerism which will prevail if he ever secures control of the provincial administration."[28] Other newspapers saw the Hitler touch in Aberhart's method of choosing candidates for the election (the ultimate selection was made by the leader and his central committee). At the conclusion of the party's founding convention in Calgary, the Alberta Labor News commented:

> ...anyone who listened to the frenzied harrangue of the Calgary Man at the closing session of his Calgary convention, or who examines the method by which his candidates are to be chosen, must see in the Aberhart methods a great resemblance to the demagogic appeal and dictatorship techniques of Herr Hitler.[29]

Two years later, when Aberhart tried to regulate the press, the newspapers again likened him to the German Fuehrer.

Beyond the specific points of objection raised by the editorialists, there were some fundamental reasons why the press turned against Social Credit. First of all, Social Credit was basically an anti-establishment movement, its aim being to make radical changes in the existing economic system. Aberhart saw the source of the economic trouble in Canada in the power and influence of the business and financial interests which, in his view, ran the country and accumulated vast amounts of money through profiteering and exorbitant interest rates. These interests made up the "Fifty Big Shots," who were constantly attacked (though never identified) by the leader and other party spokesmen. Social Credit wanted to loosen the grip of these big shots by issuing state credit and imposing a "just price" on all goods and services.

In taking an anti-establishment line, Social Credit virtually assured itself of opposition from the press, which, in city and town, was part of the establishment. The previous chapter brought out how newspapers developed and, to varying degrees, prospered under the existing economic system. Although that system was disastrously out of joint in 1935, they were still very much committed to it and not inclined to embrace something new, untried apparently unworkable.

Their generally conservative approach reinforced this reluctance to support radical change.

In the middle of a devastating depression, the establishment could not believably argue that everything was for the best in the best of all free enterprise worlds. However, it could--and did--argue that things could be immeasurably worse if Social Credit's political and economic amateurs were given an opportunity to introduce their baffling reform scheme. Newspapers reported depositors transferring their savings to banks outside the province and investors holding back funds until the outcome of the vote was known. A Social Credit victory, warned the Journal, would mean "demoralization of the whole economic life of Alberta."[30] The business community was so troubled over the prospect of the new party winning the August election that both the Calgary Board of Trade and the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, two supposedly apolitical organizations, took the unusual step of issuing public statements on Social Credit in the middle of the campaign. The concerns expressed in these critical statements were remarkably similar to what some of the newspapers were saying editorially. It was clear the establishment was united in trying to throw back the Social Credit assault.

A second major factor in the press attitude towards Social Credit was the party's lack of intellectual credentials. Aberhart's whole appeal was based on emotions rather than sound reasoning. He attempted to sway a desperate people with the promise of a monthly dividend to pay for the necessities of life but was unable to explain in a logical

way how the system would work. Fledgling political parties that have a reasoned and thoughtful approach to society's problems are able to attract members of the intellectual community (the Parti Quebecois and the CCF are two examples), and differences with opponents can be argued and debated rationally. But Social Credit held no such attraction. While there is no hard evidence, it is said the movement found its main support among the poorer and less educated element in Alberta, an element more open to demagogic appeals. In his assessment of Social Credit in the province, Major Douglas wrote:

> The character of the population, chiefly agricultural in interest and more than one-third of it drawn from the German and Ukrainian farming and peasant stocks, renders it specifically vulnerable to mass agitation.[31]

To the better educated section of the population, the Social Credit program, seeming to promise something for nothing, simply did not make any sense; it was an insult to the intelligence. The Herald's over-all attitude towards the new doctrine is summarized in a comment the general manager made to one of the reporters--"the whole thing is crazy."[32] It was natural, therefore, for the press to attack Social Credit's program on intellectual grounds, attempting to show the public that there was really nothing of substance behind all the words that rolled so smoothly out of Aberhart's mouth. Towards the end of the 1935 campaign, the Albertan said that many readings of the Social Credit platform left the impression that it was "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[33]

Having examined the press opposition to Social Credit, it is time

to consider the man at the centre of the controversy that swirled about the new party. The purpose here is to determine what factors or forces shaped the leader who set the tone for the 1935 campaign. In howling down questioners, in slurring opponents, in refusing to listen to arguments or criticism, Social Crediters took their lead from Aberhart, a man they considered a messiah. But why was the leader himself so sensitive to unfavorable comment, so intolerant of those who disagreed with him? The answer lies in Aberhart's earlier careers as a teacher-principal and fundamentalist preacher.

Aberhart[34] was born and educated in Ontario. He taught in that province for several years and then moved to Calgary in 1910 with his wife and two daughters. After a brief period of teaching, he served as principal of three schools in succession, the last one being Crescent Heights High School, where he remained until his political activities took him to the premier' office in Edmonton.

Irving records the comments and impressions of Aberhart's colleagues and students during the principal's years at Crescent Heights.[35] There is general agreement that he was efficient and energetic. However, he also appears to have been something of a drill master who had a mechanical approach to teaching.[36]

In addition to his school duties, Aberhart was deeply involved in religious activities, first in Bible instruction, then as a minister. His popularity in this field gave him further opportunity to employ the talent for organization about which he was so proud ("There's nothing I'd rather do than organize. It's a hobby with me").[37] He

was a guiding force in the establishment and development of the highly successful Calgary Prophetic Bible Conference and the succeeding Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute. However, the credit for the idea of broadcasting Aberhart's Sunday afternoon sermons, which made him such a well-known figure, belongs to another official of the Conference.[38]

Aberhart's years as a teacher, principal and preacher did not prepare him for the hurly-burly of politics. In the classroom and in the Bible Institute, he had a captive audience and his word was rarely, if ever, challenged. Students and churchgoers alike accepted unquestioningly his pronouncements on everything from mathematics to biblical interpretation. But in the political arena, things were very different. There his statements were questioned, his position criticised. It was probably the first time his authority had ever been openly challenged, and he reacted angrily, hurling abuse at the non-believers.

Schultz says Aberhart was authoritarian in manner and a strict disciplinarian.[39] The Social Credit leader's dogmatic approach can be seen in the way he handled the correspondence courses offered by the Bible Institute.

> There was never any question of an alternate position to that provided in the study books. Every question had a right and wrong interpretation and the line of demarcation was clear.[40]

In politics, it was in character for Aberhart with his authoritarian manner and fundamentalist faith to "wrap his political program in his piety and press on roughshod over the protests of his opponents."[41]

Once in the political field, Aberhart tried to pretend that crit-

icism really did not bother him, boasting that he had a rhinoceros hide. In her biography of him, Aberhart's daughter makes a similar point, saying her father "never resented criticism as criticism--only when he thought it was unfair."[42] But the opinion of others who knew him or have studied his career is strongly at odds with this assessment. They say Aberhart was vain, thin-skinned and extremely sensitive to unfavorable opinion. He could stand disapproval less than most men, says one writer.[43] Hargrave, who worked with Aberhart for a short time when Social Credit was in power, described him as having a "preacher-schoolmaster personality abnormally resentful of criticism."[44] It is the writer's contention that Aberhart's hyper-sensitivity and abnormal resentment of criticism, coupled with his authoritarian nature, accounted for both his intolerance towards those who did not share his views and his abusive overreaction when his opinions were challenged.

The resentment of Social Crediters towards the press is understandable, considering the number of newspapers lined up against the party. Critical editorials poured out in a steady stream during the campaign, sometimes two or three a day, sometimes on the front page as well as on the editorial page. It was probably the most concentrated editorial assault ever made on a Canadian political party during an election. Editorials, however, are only opinions, and newspapers are as entitled as any citizen to express opinions in a democratic society. What is--or what should be--of more concern to a political party is whether the party is given an opportunity, no matter what the news-

paper's editorial stand, to make its views and program known. From this point of view, how did the Alberta press measure up? The performance of the province's two larges dailies[45] gives some indication.

The Herald and the Journal were not party newspapers, although both were long-time supporters of the Conservative party. They belonged to the Southam group but each newspaper determined its own editorial policy.[46]

If the Herald perceived a special role for itself in the 1935 campaign, it did not state it publicly. However, in April, several months before the election, the newspaper made a statement indicating its approach to the Social Credit party. Replying to Aberhart's call for a boycott of the newspaper because it allegedly was unfair to him, the Herald said it was difficult to discover in what way it had been unfair to him

> ...unless it is that we have dared to counsel the people of this province to beware of the will-of-the-wisp promises that this pulpiteer is dangling before them. We have pointed out the financial and constitutional weaknesses of his plan as far as he has divulged it, as is the duty of a newspaper. At the same time, we have given generous space to the expression of views favorable to the Aberhart plan.[47]

At the time it denied Aberhart's charge of unfairness, the Herald could probably make a good case for its coverage of the Social Credit movement. The founding convention was reported in some detail, as has been noted. As well, the Herald began printing every week or so a "fairly representative" sample of letters on Social Credit, both favorable and unfavorable.[48] This took up all or most of a page. In ad-

dition, perhaps as a result of Aberhart's criticism, the newspaper in early May offered a full page to the Social Credit leader, at no cost, to present detailed plans for the application of his policy in the government of Alberta.[49]

But in succeeding weeks, especially during the campaign, the newspaper's concern for fairness seemed to slacken. In early summer it opened its editorial and other pages to several series of columns critically examining Social Credit proposals, with no indication there had been an attempt to obtain articles supporting Aberhart's scheme. One of the series ran to twenty-seven articles, another to eighteen. In the latter stages of the campaign, space devoted to Social Credit meetings became minimal,[50] and the main publicity the party received was in the form of negative headlines ("Aberhart's Plan Scored By McGeer").[51] As for the letters on Social Credit, published as a special feature, the Herald said that "utmost fairness" had been shown to writers advocating Social Credit and "very few letters favoring Social Credit were omitted."[52] But not everyone was convinced. Irving says readers could not help noticing the letters condemning Social Credit were of a fairly high standard, while those favoring it were "so absurd as to suggest that they had been deliberately selected for publication, if not actually written, by the Herald's staff."[53]

For its part, the Journal, as adamant as the Herald in opposing Aberhart and his party, appeared to devote considerably more space in the campaign to coverage of Social Credit meetings and to the presentation of the party's views. When Aberhart visited Edmonton for a week

towards the end of the campaign, the newspaper carried several stories on his rallies, some of them almost a column in length and most of them on a page devoted to the election. While the Journal strongly attacked Social Credit on the editorial page and in several front page editorials, it also gave Social Credit and the other four major parties[54] free space daily (about one-half column each) to outline their policies in a week-long political forum. When a Social Credit candidate suggested at one meeting that people should leave newspapers out of their reading habits because the press was not providing correct information on the movement, the Journal answered by saying that

> ...newspapers are not in the habit of damaging their reputation by deliberately misrepresenting any political cause. If it can be shown that they have made misstatements they feel duty bound to correct these. The Journal has never failed to do so and has devoted much of its space to presenting what the Social Credit and other parties had to say...[55]

The comment by the Social Credit candidate was typical, a good indication of how that party's supporters felt about the press. Even when newspapers carried verbatim policy statements from the party they were still accused of misrepresenting the Social Credit gospel. It took only a mild editorial comment (and the Herald editorials were anything but mild) to provoke Aberhart, who apparently was incapable of seeing any rational reasoning behind arguments against his policies. Noting that Aberhart accused critics of throwing mud at him, the Bulletin said newspapers had analysed his credit certificates scheme and pointed out why they could not approve of it. "That surely is not mud-slinging, nor a matter for complaint?"[56] Attacks on the press were not limited

to the larger newspapers, supposedly linked to the hated financial interests. When the Alberta Labor News drew attention to the unwillingness of the Social Credit leader to discuss the dividend scheme, he accused the weekly of "dirty, low down tactics."[57] The Alberta Labor News said it had tried to be "scrupulously fair," but concluded that no criticism of his proposals could be fair enough or sincere enough "to escape being termed 'dirty, low down tactics' by Mr. Aberhart."[58] Some newspapers were fairer than others in their treatment of Social Credit campaign. But the point is that Aberhart and his supporters made no distinction--one question about party policy, one critical comment, and a newspaper joined the ranks of the evil opposition forces.

Social Crediters perhaps can be excused for feeling persecuted because of the press opposition in the 1935 campaign. No doubt it was dispiriting to face so much unfavorable newspaper comment, especially at a time when the party was just getting organized as a new political force. But given this, the reaction of Aberhart and his followers to press opposition still appears excessive. The virulent attacks against the newspapers and the attempt to boycott one daily are not the actions of reasonable people who believe they can win the support of the electorate through the force of their arguments and the justness of their cause. Other politicians and other parties have faced an overwhelmingly hostile press and still managed to retain a certain degree of equanimity.

Both the New Democratic Party and its predecessor, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, have been generally unhappy with coverage in

the newspaper and lack of editorial support.[59] One party supporter suggests this failure to receive a "fair break" in the press is a key factor in NDP electoral defeats.[60] Yet, like Social Credit, both the CCF and NDP have won provincial elections in the face of solid newspaper opposition, some of it bitter and strident. After his party's fifth straight provincial victory in Saskatchewan, Premier T. C. Douglas expressed wonder at the outcome.

> This is one of the great marvels. We are a party without a single newspaper. We have no sugar daddies. We have no radio stations. We just haven't anything.[61]

It can be assumed the CCF government in Saskatchewan did not appreciate a hostile press any more than the Aberhart government did. But the reaction of the two governments to the criticism and attacks in the newspapers was revealingly different. In Saskatchewan, says Higginbotham, the CCF government "did nothing to muzzle or restrict the press."[62] In Alberta, on the other hand, the Social Credit government, after numerous threats by its leader, tried to impose controls on the newspapers.

In the United States, the Democrats have also faced a great deal of newspaper opposition. Historically, most American newspapers have generally supported the Republican party. Stevenson believed the "overwhelming majority of the press is just against Democrats...automatically, as dogs are against cats."[63] According to one poll, when Roosevelt first ran for the presidency, in 1932, he had the "active support" of newspapers representing 38 per cent of daily circulation in

the country, as against 55 per cent for his opponent.[64] The Democratic share dropped when Roosevelt sought his third and fourth terms, in 1940 and 1944. The figures then were 25 and 17 per cent, respectively.[65] In 1948, Truman was backed by newspapers representing only 10 per cent of daily circulation, while his Republican opponent had 78 per cent, and a similar situation faced Stevenson when he unsuccessfully ran against Eisenhower in 1952.[66]

Over the years Democrats have complained about this one-sidedness. Ickes, for example, said the steady decline in newspaper support for Roosevelt revealed an "unprecedented and progressively perilous situation requiring public consideration."[67] Stevenson said he was "considerably concerned" over the development of a "one-party press in a two-party country."[68] Yet for all their concern (and perhaps bitterness) Democrats did not resort to the abusive name-calling tactics of the Social Crediters. Nor did they try to cripple an opposition newspaper by organizing a boycott against it. The difference in the reaction of the two parties says something about the difference between them in open-mindedness and toleration.

In their determined opposition to Social Credit, Alberta newspapers may have unwittingly contributed to the very outcome they tried to prevent. For one thing, they provided a concrete target for Aberhart to attack—much to the delight of his audiences. As well, the almost solid opposition of the newspapers possibly gave Aberhart a certain sympathy vote. Here was a God-fearing school principal trying his best to improve the hard lot of his depression-stricken fellow citizens,

and the newspapers were all against him. One Calgary publisher later wondered whether his newspaper had not carried the attack on Social Credit too far.[69]

The results of the 1935 election are difficult to analyse in these terms without additional information. Social Credit received 54.2 per cent of the total popular vote but only 36.6 per cent in Edmonton (where the party elected two members out of six), as against 58.5 per cent in Calgary (four members out of six) and 56.3 per cent in the constituencies outside the two major metropolitan areas.[70] Did the Herald campaign against Social Credit actually help the party in that city? Or was the bigger Social Credit vote there due to other reasons (for example, the fact that the movement began in Calgary and was based there throughout its period of tremendous growth)?

It is obvious the newspapers failed miserably in their effort to keep Aberhart's party from power. Leaving aside the question of how many Albertans were prepared to adopt the new economic doctrine simply because it offered some hope of relief from the debilitating depression, the explanation for the press failure appears to lie mainly in Social Credit's superb political organization, the extensive tours made by the leader and other officials, and the full exploitation of a relatively new medium of mass communication--radio.

Aberhart's considerable talent for organization was put to full use as his religious activities gradually evolved into the Social Credit movement between 1933 and 1935--instructing potential teachers, distributing literature, establishing study groups. By the autumn of 1934,

some 1,800 Social Credit groups had been formed.[71] Personal tours were part of the organizing process, and for months before the election was announced, Aberhart and other leading figures in the movement criss-crossed the province to spread the message and set up study groups. When the election came, Social Credit rallies drew impressive crowds. Ten thousand people turned out for the opening of the campaign, a picnic at the Edmonton Exhibition Grounds. In one week Aberhart estimated he addressed a total of 15,000 people at meetings in such centres as Athabasca and Camrose.[72]

With the established press so hostile, Social Crediters could turn to their own party newspaper, the weekly Alberta Social Credit Chronicle, founded in 1934, with Aberhart's blessing. A year later, when the election campaign got under way, the newspaper had a circulation of 13,800. It was unabashedly a party vehicle, with lengthy and enthusiastic accounts of meetings, messages from Aberhart (whose picture was carried week after week when the newspaper began publication), and numerous notices of study group meetings, party picnics and the speaking itineraries of officials.

But the biggest single factor in Social Credit's successful campaign appears to have been Aberhart's skilful use of radio. Commercial radio came to Canada in 1922, when two stations opened simultaneously in Winnipeg.[73] It became instantly popular, and by the middle of the following year sixty-two commercial broadcasting licences had been issued.[74] Another indication of the appeal of the new medium is shown by the rapid increase in the number of sets in Alberta during

the first years of the depression. In 1930, there were 21,479 private receiving licences issued in the province; by 1935, the figure had more than doubled--49,107.[75]

It was in 1925 that Aberhart began using radio to broadcast the fundamentalist sermons that had won him a loyal following in Calgary. He turned out to be as effective on the air as in front of his own congregation. His voice had a hypnotic quality, and he was able to project his forceful personality over the airwaves.[76] "Charismatic" is probably the word we would use today to describe him.

Aberhart was fortunate in his choice of stations. For many years CFCN, which billed itself as "The Voice of the Prairies," was the most powerful station in the country. Within a decade Aberhart's radio audience had grown to an estimated 300,000,[77] and he was one of the best-known radio personalities on the prairies. At one point he was broadcasting about five hours every Sunday.[78] By the time he introduced Social Credit theories into his religious broadcasts in 1933, he had a large audience of believing and willing followers. Most of the listeners, says Anderson, already looked to Aberhart for guidance and leadership in religious matters, and they were "prepared to listen to him about political and economic problems as well."[79] In 1934, Aberhart began broadcasting on Tuesday evening over CFCN as well as on Sunday. It says something for his mastery of the medium and his gifts as a teacher that a series of programs dealing with the economic situation became highly popular with listeners. Under Aberhart, the program called "The Man from Mars" was a "sort of economic comedy show."[80]

By the time the 1935 campaign began, Aberhart had ten years of broadcasting experience, and there was "no device or technique of the radio speaker that...(he) had not mastered."[81] His Sunday broadcasts reportedly drew more Alberta listeners than the Jack Benny show which followed.[82]

During the campaign, the broadcasts provided Aberhart with an unexampled opportunity not only to propagate Social Credit doctrine but also to deal with critics, without fear of interruption or embarrassing questions.

> ...he proceeded to refute the charges with sure answers and biting sarcasm, with his audience breaking into applause at his more stinging counters....Thus his opponents gave him ammunition in various sizes...they saw too late that he could, by masterly selection and arrangement of his contributions, develop not only complete and telling refutations but the most effective speeches of the campaign.[83]

At one level, the 1935 campaign can be seen as a contest between two mass media: the press (strongly opposed to Social Credit) versus radio (the major medium of mass communication used by Aberhart's party). The actual influence of each medium in the campaign has not been scientifically studied, but research conducted into the influence of the media in other elections suggests certain conclusions regarding the Alberta vote in 1935.

A study of the 1940 United States presidential election showed that to the extent the formal media exerted any influence at all on the vote intention or actual vote, "radio proved more effective than the newspaper."[84] It was found that listeners got a sense of personal

access from radio which was absent from newspapers; radio came closer to establishing a personal relationship and hence was more effective.

> Although the radio and newspaper ranked about the same as general sources, the radio was mentioned half again as frequently as the single most important source of influence.[85]

A certain parallel can be found between the 1935 Alberta election and the 1940 United States presidential election, as far as the media are concerned. In the United States, most of the country's newspapers backed the Republican candidate, Willkie, and the party preferred that medium. The Democrats favored radio, and Roosevelt's appealing radio voice enabled him to exploit radio far more effectively than his opponent.[86] In Alberta, as we have seen, the newspapers were solidly against Social Credit, while the party leader used radio with consummate skill.

In another study, this one in Elmira, New York, covering the 1948 presidential election, it was found that the more exposure to the campaign in the mass media, the "more interested voters become and the more strongly they come to feel about their candidate."[87] With his tremendous following on radio, it can be assumed that Aberhart in 1935 received more mass media exposure than his opponents, and, on the basis of the United States experience, this conceivably strengthened the commitment of his supporters.[88]

Whatever the reason for the commitment, the newspapers were unable to change it. This is in keeping with the findings of Sandman, Rubin and Sachsman, who say the power of the mass media to change

people's minds directly is very limited; people "don't like to have their minds changed, and so they ignore or misinterpret attempts to do so--usually successfully."[89] Thus the daily editorials and numerous articles by professors and others criticising Social Credit theory and Aberhart failed to stop the party from taking power. The faith of Alberta voters in the "second Moses" was just too strong to be shaken, and, thanks to radio, this faith was province-wide.

In this chapter we have seen how the press and Social Crediters formed into opposing camps during the 1935 election campaign. The newspapers, defending the existing order, were sceptical and critical of the new party and its autocratic leader. For their part, Social Crediters, believing in their cause with zealous certainty, refused to tolerate any criticism or questions. The enmity established between the press and Social Credit in the 1935 campaign carried over into the early years of the Social Credit administration, a period to be examined in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Hanna Herald, April 11, 1935. Mrs. Gostick was elected to the legislature in August, one of four successful Social Credit candidates in Calgary.

[2]August 22, 1935.

[3]The leader of the movement did not stand for election at the time. He was unanimously chosen to represent Okotoks when the member for that constituency resigned in favor of Aberhart later in the year.

[4]John A. Irving, The Social Credit Movement in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 183.

[5]Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, Book I, Canada: 1867-1939 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1940), p. 171.

[6]St. Paul Journal, July 24, 1935.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Calgary Daily Herald, April 20, 1935.

[9]Alberta Social Credit Chronicle, August 10, 1934.

[10]Hereafter in the text called the Bulletin.

[11]The commonly accepted amount was $25 for each adult, as suggested in the Social Credit Manual, although Aberhart said this figure was used only for illustration.

[12]Edmonton Journal, August 8, 1935.

[13]Alberta Labor News, June 29, 1935.

[14]Ibid., July 27, 1935.

[15]Innisfail Province, July 25, 1935.

[16]William Aberhart, Social Credit Manual: Social Credit as Applied to the Province of Alberta (Calgary: Western Printing and Litho. Co., 1935), p. 27.

[17]Edmonton Journal, August 16, 1935.

[18]Hanna Herald, June 6, 1935.

[19]Edmonton Bulletin, August 1, 1935.

[20]Calgary Daily Herald, August 16, 1935.

[21]Edmonton Journal, July 25, 1935.

[22]Edmonton Bulletin, July 29, 1935; Hanna Herald, July 18, 1935.

[23]Alberta Labor News, June 8, 1935.

[24]Hanna Herald, May 9, 1935.

[25]Calgary Daily Herald, July 26, 1935.

[26]Alberta Labor News, July 20, 1935.

[27]Alberta Social Credit Chronicle, May 31, 1935.

[28]Calgary Daily Herald, April 29, 1935.

[29]Alberta Labor News, April 13, 1935.

[30]Edmonton Journal, July 17, 1935.

[31]C. H. Douglas, The Alberta Experiment (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937), p. 4.

[32]Fred Kennedy, Alberta Was My Beat (Calgary: The Albertan, 1975), p. 215.

[33]Calgary Albertan, August 19, 1935.

[34]The original Prussian name was Eberhardt. It was changed when Aberhart's parents moved to Canada. Charles A. Bowman, Ottawa Editor (Sidney, B. C.: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1966), p. 194.

[35]Irving, Social Credit Movement, pp. 15-24.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Harold J. Schultz, "Portrait of a Premier: William Aberhart," in Ramsay Cook, ed., Politics of Discontent (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 3.

[38]Irving, Social Credit Movement, p. 31.

[39]Schultz, "Portrait of a Premier," p. 3.

[40]Ibid., p. 8.

[41]Ibid.

[42]L. P. V. Johnson and Ola MacNutt, Aberhart of Alberta (Edmonton: Co-Op Press Ltd., 1970), p. 164.

[43]Barbara Moon, "Aberhart: The Man and the Shadow," Maclean's, March 15, 1953, p. 23.

[44]Edmonton Journal, August 3, 1937.

[45]The circulation of the Journal in 1935 was 35,000, the Herald, about 32,000. Edmonton Journal, August 12, 1935; figures supplied by the Calgary Herald.

[46]A fuller explanation of Southam policy regarding the editorial opinions of its newspapers is given in Charles Bruce, News and the Southams(Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), pp. 190-193. One example of the company's decentralized editorial policy can be seen in the support given Social Credit in the twenties by the Ottawa Citizen, another Southam newspaper. In 1923, at the suggestion of UFA member William Irvine, the Select Standing Committee on Banking and Commerce agreed to ask Major Douglas to appear, although the committee did not wish to pay his expenses. Irvine reported this to Charles A. Bowman, editor of the Citizen, and he in turn talked to the newspaper's co-publishers, Harry and Wilson Southam. The publishers offered to pay the expenses, so Major Douglas and his wife came to Canada from Britain "as the guests of the Southam brothers." Bowman, Ottawa Editor, p. 187.

[47]Calgary Daily Herald, April 29, 1935.

[48]Ibid., April 20, 1935.

[49]Relations between the two sides had deteriorated to such an extent by this time that Aberhart coldly refused the offer. He accused the newspaper of refusing to treat Social Credit fairly--"ignoring it when it seemed politic to do so, misrepresenting and falsifying when you felt it was to your advantage, and confusing it often times with personalities." Besides, said Aberhart, on the eve of an election, it was not "usual for the leader of any party to submit his plans to the 'intelligence department' of definitely declared opposing forces." Calgary Daily Herald, May 11, 1935.

[50]Perhaps this was simply a matter of the reporters finding little at the Social Credit rallies that they or their editors considered newsworthy. According to Irving, the newspapers complained that Social Credit speakers tiresomely repeated the same thing over and over again to each succeeding audience. "Under the circumstances, what could a newspaper do more than say that, in effect, 'Mr. A. said last night

the same as he said before.'" Irving, Social Credit Movement, p. 313. This, in fact, was exactly how one newspaper did report a meeting. "Mr. Aberhart at Hillhurst delivered the same address as that which he gave Monday at Al Azhar Temple and Riverside school, attacking the Economic Safety League and giving voting instructions to his followers." Calgary Albertan, August 7, 1935.

[51]Calgary Daily Herald, August 19, 1935.

[52]Ibid., August 17, 1935. The Hanna Herald, not related to the Calgary daily, made a similar statement about its letters policy and suggested Social Crediters themselves were to blame if their views were not adequately represented in the correspondence columns. When a Social Crediter wrote to the town newspaper and complained about alleged favoritism shown to letter writers from other parties, the Hanna Herald replied: "...the columns of this paper have, since Aberhartism first became an issue, been open to both sides....If proponents of Aberhartism have failed to avail themselves of this opportunity to the same extent as the opponents...that is their responsibility. The (Hanna) Herald has been unable to publish a number of lengthy letters opposing Mr. Aberhart's new political party, but we have no record of ever having excluded a pro-social credit letter from our columns." Hanna Herald, August 8, 1935.

[53]Irving, Social Credit Movement, p. 319.

[54]Labor, Liberal, Progressive Conservative, UFA.

[55]Edmonton Journal, August 8, 1935.

[56]Edmonton Bulletin, July 29, 1935.

[57]Alberta Labor News, June 8, 1935.

[58]Ibid.

[59]The only Canadian daily newspaper of any significant size ever to support the NDP editorially was the Windsor Star, which backed the party in the 1972 federal election.

[60]Prairie New Democratic Commonwealth, September 4, 1968.

[61]C. H. Higginbotham, Off the Record: The CCF in Saskatchewan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1968), p. 69.

[62]Ibid., p. 21

[63]John Bartlow Martin, Adlai Stevenson of Illinois (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 668.

[64]Edwin Emery, Phillip H. Ault and Warren K. Agee, Introduction to Mass Communications, 2nd ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 146.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.

[67]William L. Chenery, Freedom of the Press (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955), p. 159.

[68]Martin, Stevenson of Illinois, p. 668.

[69]Irving, Social Credit Movement, p. 321.

[70]Major A. L. Normandin, ed., The Canadian Parliamentary Guide (Hull, Que.: Labour Exchange, 1936), pp. 395-398.

[71]Irving, Social Credit Movement, p. 343.

[72]Ibid., p. 311.

[73]Bruce Raymond, "Radio," in John A. Irving, ed., Mass Media in Canada (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1962), p. 92.

[74]Ibid., p. 93.

[75]Canada, The Canada Year Book 1931 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1931), p. 731; Canada, The Canada Year Book 1936 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1936), p. 733.

[76]John A. Irving, "Psychological Aspects of the Social Credit Movement" Part III, in Canadian Journal of Psychology, Vol. 1 (September 1947) pp. 138-139.

[77]W. E. Mann, Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), p. 22.

[78]Tony Cashman, Ernest C. Manning: A Bibliographical Sketch (Edmonton: The Alberta Social Credit League, n.d.), p. 12.

[79]Owen A. Anderson, "The Alberta Social Credit Party: An Empirical Analysis of Membership, Characteristics, Participation and Opinions" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1972), p. 99.

[80]Tony Cashman, An Illustrated History of Western Canada (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig, 1971), p. 213.

[81]Irving, "Psychological Aspects," p. 138.

[82]Moon, "Aberhart," p. 52.

[83]Johnson, MacNutt, Alberhart of Alberta, p. 133.

[84]Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 252.

[85]Ibid., p. 126.

[86]Ibid., pp. 129-131.

[87]Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William N. McPhee, Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 252.

[88]Flanagan says Social Credit was "relatively weak" in certain northwestern constituencies and suggests one reason might be the poorer radio reception there. In 1935, CFCN had a capacity of 10,000 watts. "With the lower interference level of the day, this was enough to be heard intermittently under favourable conditions, north of Edmonton; it was not enough for consistent reception." Thomas Flanagan, "Political Geography and the United Farmers of Alberta," in S. M. Trofimenkoff, ed., The Twenties in Western Canada (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, National Museum of Canada, 1972), p. 158.

[89]Peter B. Sandman, David M. Rubin and David B. Sachsman, Media: An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communications (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1972), p. 12.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL CREDIT'S MOTIVES

> Why should any daily or weekly paper protest against being required to tell the truth?....And what right have they to print lies to cause disturbances among peace-loving, contented people?
>
> --Premier William Aberhart[1]

The outcome of the 1935 election did not change the hostility that had developed between the Social Credit movement and the Alberta press, but it did alter the respective positions. No longer was Social Credit simply a populist reform group attacking the old order and promising a new and more equitable economic system. Now it was in full control of the provincial administration, with an opportunity to implement the electoral promises that had given many Albertans renewed hope for the future. Social Credit dreamers and theorists were suddenly faced with hard reality. As for the press, it no longer was merely pointing out the weaknesses in the strange and at times unfathomable proposals of a radical new party. Now, with Social Credit's overwhelming majority in the legislature, it assumed the role of unofficial opposition,[2] keeping a critical watch on an inexperienced new government attempting to carry out its promise to reshape the economic system.

Initially, there was an undeclared truce between the newspapers and the Aberhart administration. Editorialists managed to offer a few words that could pass as good wishes, including favorable comment on

two or three of the ministers chosen to serve in the cabinet. For his part, the new premier found nothing to complain about in the press coverage of his first weeks in office.[3] But the old mistrust and suspicions generated by the 1935 election were not far from the surface. The press appeared determined to hold the government to the promises made during the campaign. Voters, said the Herald, had possession of Social Credit's printed manuals and "they are standing by."[4] On the other side, Aberhart obviously had not forgotten the critical press attitude in the months just passed. As early as November, while noting the "excellent co-operation" of reporters, Aberhart assured a Social Credit supporter that, if necessary, the government would not hesitate to take "definite action" against the press.[5]

Just what the premier meant by "definite action" became known two years later when the Social Credit government brought in its Accurate News and Information Act. With this measure, Aberhart attempted to establish radically different rules for the operation of the press in Alberta, giving the government a voice in deciding what should be published.

This chapter is concerned with what transpired between 1935 and 1937 to prompt the Social Credit administration to introduce such legislation. Aberhart and his colleagues sought to justify their action on the basis of repeated charges that the press misrepresented or lied about the Social Credit administration and its policies, and that it was unfair to the government. The first section of the chapter examines these charges, arguing that the Social Credit case against the news-

papers was not convincing. It will be shown that the government and its supporters rarely produced specific evidence of misrepresentation or lying in the press. For their part, the newspapers, faced with the repeated threat of official action, had a compelling incentive to report the government accurately and to make corrections when shown to be in error. As for the charge of unfairness, several examples are cited to show the opportunities made available to the government to present its views in the newspapers. The second section contends that the government's true motives in introducing the Accurate News and Information Act were concerned with propaganda, revenge, finding a scapegoat, and, most important of all, trying to stop the flow of unfavorable publicity in the press. It is argued that this publicity was badly hurting the Aberhart government, which seemed incapable of dealing with the many problems and crises that marked its first years in office.

An essential first step is to establish just what Social Crediters were complaining about in their charges against the press. In his attacks, the premier favored words like "misrepresentation" and "falsity," although he was frequently blunter and accused the newspapers of lying. The meaning seemed clear enough: the newspapers were publishing false information about the government and its policies; their reports were wrong. But in an interview for this paper, Aberhart's close cabinet colleague, Ernest Manning, gave a markedly different interpretation of the Social Credit charges. Much of the reporting in those days, he said, was "very, very biased...slanted to give the impression that the

government was either wrong or foolish, or to misrepresent the position that the government really adopted."[6] He accused the press of "misrepresentation by emphasis," stating that it was not a matter of saying something false, but rather of "slanting the emphasis or giving all the emphasis to a certain aspect."[7] In this way, he argued, it was possible to mislead the public just as easily as by publishing something that was not true.

It is readily conceded that Aberhart's government may have been disturbed by the emphasis the newspapers put on one aspect of a story or another. This question of emphasis, however, is really a matter of news judgment, a subject on which the press and government of all political coloring are frequently at odds. What a government wants to see emphasized in its policies is not necessarily what an editor considers to be the most newsworthy part of those policies. But the writer contends that Social Credit accusations against the press in 1935-1937 had little, if anything, to do with this. Aberhart was a former school principal who prided himself on his precise use of words, and the words he used in attacking the press carry an unmistakable meaning. His public statements and his correspondence dealing with the press contain little evidence to suggest that when he accused the newspapers of misrepresentation, of publishing falsities and lies, he was merely referring to the "slanting" of news or the "emphasis" given to a particular aspect of a story. In one of his early public comments on the desirability of licensing the press, the premier said such a move would ensure the supply of news was correct in fact.[8] For the purposes of this

chapter, then, the accusations of Aberhart and other Social Crediters are taken to mean the press published inaccurate reports on the government. The ultimate support for this interpretation can be found in the administration's own press bill, which, as its title indicates, was introduced to ensure accurate news and information.

The press opposition to the Social Credit government during its first years in office was almost unanimous, virtually the same as it had been in the 1935 campaign, with one notable exception (to be dealt with later). Of the hundred-odd newspapers published in the province, according to one estimate, only three supported the Aberhart administration--one daily and two weeklies.[9]

In the opening months, when the government appeared to be following a traditional course, newspaper comment was relatively temperate. The Herald, for example, complimented the premier on his choice of R. J. Magor of Montreal as financial adviser, said Aberhart was entitled to the support of all citizens in his efforts to balance the budget, and pledged its own support for his promised education reforms.[10] The first speech from the throne was found merely "somewhat surprising and disappointing" because the government failed to spell out how it intended to improve conditions,[11] while the first budget, in March, 1936, brought the comment that the government "has come down to earth, for the present at least."[12]

The editorials became sharper, however, as the government moved to bring in the Social Credit system or attempted other experimental measures.[13] If the Journal and Herald can be taken as representative,

the criticism concentrated on the economic effects of the administration policies. Plans for the introduction of "prosperity bonds" or scrip, for example, were strongly attacked, with the Journal siding with wholesalers, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta branch of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and other business interests opposing the scheme. The scrip plan, said the Journal, would bring "chaotic conditions" that would "further impede to a serious extent the province's economic recovery."[14] This concern over Alberta's economic health was reflected in numerous editorials. At the conclusion of the third Social Credit session, in the spring of 1937, the Herald said the net result was "an increase in the confusion and uncertainty that have retarded business recovery and impaired investor confidence...."[15]

Again, as in the 1935 campaign, opposition to Social Credit saw newspapers of widely varying ideologies lined up together. When the government announced legislation giving it vast power to license business and employees, both the Journal and the labor newspaper, the People's Weekly,[16] accused Aberhart of moving towards a dictatorship. At frequent intervals various newspapers likened Aberhart's proposals and tactics to Hitler's, and by the time the press act was introduced the press seemed convinced the comparison was valid.

At least one Social Crediter--and perhaps only one--was not upset by what the newspapers said about the Aberhart administration. Almost one-and-one-half years after the election, a special adviser to the government checked editorials up to that time and concluded that "attacks made by the press against Aberhart and 'Social Credit' were, on

the whole, very mild indeed."[17] This view, however, was not shared by Aberhart and his followers. A little more than four months after assuming office, the premier told a Calgary rally that every time the government made an effort to correct the situation in the province, "we were met at once by a barrage from the press."[18] And before the first year elapsed, Manning spoke of the "daily bombardment of the capitalistic press."[19] Thus the criticism by the opposition newspapers was viewed by Aberhart and other Social Crediters as total and sustained warfare.

Aberhart tried to deal with the criticism in different ways. One way, as in the election campaign, was to pretend he was not bothered by the attacks. When a woman wrote him and offered her sympathy because of the way he and Manning were criticised and maligned, he replied in a radio broadcast: "I don't know how Mr. Manning feels, but you needn't sympathize with me, lady."[20] Another approach was to brush off the criticism by saying the government was too busy with its great task to be concerned with what the newspapers said.

> A great many silly attacks are made upon me and the movement which I represent, but I do not permit these expressions...to disturb me. Needless to say, I have many more important things to think about.[21]

But it was obvious that the steady press attacks bothered him a great deal. Despite the very real pressure of work, he always found time to deal with the newspapers in his own way--by attacking his critics. Week after week in his Sunday radio broadcasts he would hurl

charges and abuse at the press. These attacks became a part of the program, although some supporters felt Aberhart was overdoing it. A Calgarian suggested the premier "not spend too much time sunday [sic] afternoon in discussing the cheap contemptable [sic], political, disgruntled gutter snipes...."[22]

While Aberhart and other Social Crediters were always ready to criticise the newspapers, they rarely were specific in their accusations, preferring instead to make sweeping generalizations, to tar all newspapers with the same brush. Consider, for example, this excerpt from Aberhart's broadcast from the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute on January 17, 1937:

> ...certain portions of the present press...have not evidently the slightest compunction or scruples whatever in boldly publishing falsity and misrepresentations which most people can detect on the very surface. The last two or three weeks it is so plainly evident that the stories published had no atom of truth in it [sic].[23]

Here the press was accused of printing falsehoods and misrepresentations, of publishing stories that had no factual basis. For any newspaper concerned about its reputation, there can hardly be a more serious charge. Yet the premier carefully avoided naming the alleged offenders or identifying the false stories, leaving newspapers with nothing specific to answer and making it virtually impossible to establish the validity of his charges. And this is not an isolated example; it was the standard tactic, used week after week. Instead of singling out a specific story or comment in one particular newspaper, Aberhart would

talk about falsities and misrepresentations or lies in "the press" or "the newspapers."

This demagogic technique undoubtedly made it easy for the premier to brand virtually all newspapers as villains and to stir up hatred of this common enemy among his listeners. It might also indicate, however, that Aberhart's case against Alberta newspapers was not that strong. When such damaging charges are made week after week, it is reasonable to expect the accuser to produce evidence to support his allegations. If that evidence is not produced, a certain doubt arises as to whether it actually exists.

The press, accused so often of publishing lies, tried to obtain evidence from the premier, but without success. In 1936, the Alberta Division of the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association forwarded a resolution to Aberhart protesting "unwarranted attacks" and charges that the province's newspapers deliberately published untruths to influence public opinion.[24] The resolution, passed at a Calgary convention, suggested the premier or other offended parties either seek redress in the courts or "state to which acts and newspapers you refer, so that newspapers as a whole may cease to be placed in the unfair light...in which they find themselves today."[25] Ten days later the Association president sent another letter, saying he trusted Aberhart would either refrain from his continued misrepresentation of the press or take definite action against those newspapers he claimed were telling lies.[26] Individual newspapers were not any more successful in getting the premier to name names and cite examples. At one point the Journal said those de-

nouncing the press would be better employed answering the criticism than in "talking all the time about misrepresentations to which they are subjected without giving any particulars."[27]

Aberhart not only refrained from giving particulars in most instances[28] but also ignored or declined to act upon the suggestions that he go to court. In court, of course, accusations must be supported by evidence. However, Aberhart, supposedly outraged by the performance of the press, found a convenient excuse for avoiding this course of action. When a Bonnyville group of Social Crediters forwarded articles from the Bonnyville Nouvelle and asked for his advice, the premier replied that "it is clearly a matter of libel, but it requires so much time and expense...that I have decided it is not worth the trouble."[29] Thus, for the most part, the charges against the press by Aberhart, his colleagues and other followers rest simply on what the accusers said, not on any solid evidence they produced.[30]

As for the newspapers, it was in their own best interest to publish factual accounts of government activities and, when in error, to make the necessary correction. Only in this way, said the Journal, could a newspaper retain the confidence of its readers and thus stay in business.[31] During the first years of the Social Credit government, the newspapers had a special reason for striving for accuracy in their reports on the Aberhart administration. As early as June, 1936, the premier publicly proposed the idea of licensing the press to ensure publication of factual reports.[32] This proposal, a not-so-veiled threat that was repeated several times, hung over the heads of all

newspaper owners and editors in the province, a warning of what would happen if they were not careful. Newspaper owners appeared to be "very much afraid of the threat to license the press," according to Hargrave, and "had given instructions to their editors not to attack Aberhart 'good and proper.'"[33]

The press was therefore anxious to correct its mistakes--when Social Crediters supplied particulars. Shortly after the election, for example, Aberhart apparently accused the Red Deer Advocate of publishing false information, and then stated or implied that he had requested a retraction. In a letter to the premier, an official of the newspaper said that a member of his staff had checked into the matter and "had no knowledge of any untruth regarding the Social Credit movement or yourself appearing in the Advocate and still less any request to us to retract such statement."[34] The official asked for further information, saying that any accusation of refusal to retract an untrue statement "is a serious thing for any newspaper and we are anxious to clear ourselves of this charge."[35] When two cabinet ministers claimed they were misquoted in speeches to a Social Credit meeting, the Journal published their subsequent statements on what they had said, carrying the item at approximately the same place on the same page as the original story appeared. Manning, who was provincial secretary, also claimed he was misquoted at one point. Both the Journal and the Herald published his correction statement, with the Herald pointing out that its original story did not refer to what Manning denied saying. Even when the newspapers were accused only indirectly, they opened their

pages to the government. A statement issued by Manning to counter "wholly unwarranted rumors" regarding bank legislation was carried in full on the front page of the Journal, running to about three-quarters of a column.[36]

In addition to the charges of misrepresentation and lying that were thrown at them by Social Crediters, the newspapers, as noted earlier, were also accused of being unfair to the government. If this meant the opposition press was almost always critical, with few good words to say about Aberhart's administration, then Social Crediters certainly could find ample evidence to support their case. Every action of the government, says Mallory, was played up in the western newspapers from a "critical point of view and it was seldom indeed that any action of the government came in for praise or even escaped comment."[37] But the newspapers saw this as their job at a time when a new and inexperienced government was experimenting with an untested economic formula. Answering a reader's complaint about its approach, the Herald said it had criticised and questioned the government "not because we felt it was our right, but because we felt it was our duty."[38]

If, on the other hand, Social Crediters meant by their charge of unfairness that newspapers were supressing the government's side of issues--that they were not publishing what Aberhart and his ministers said on behalf of administration programs and policies--then they were unwilling or unable to present any proof to support the accusation. Such a charge, if backed by solid evidence, would have raised legit-

imate questions about freedom of the press and the responsibility of newspapers. One of the concepts of the libertarian theory of the press, as we have seen, is that free newspapers provide a forum for ideas and opinions from which truth emerges. The evidence indicates the newspapers provided such a forum, devoting considerable space to government proposals and the views of Aberhart, his cabinet and other Social Crediters. The Journal, for example, carried the full texts of certain bills (it published on two separate occasions the covenants that were to be signed to register for dividends), the full texts of statements by Aberhart and other major figures in the administration, plus lengthy accounts of what ministers said in debates over new legislation (at times a ministerial speech ran to two columns).

Both the Journal and Herald reported, sometimes at length, the "political" portions of Aberhart's Sunday addresses, broadcast alternate weeks from Calgary and Edmonton.[39] Four months after the election, the Herald devoted almost four columns to a verbatim report of Aberhart's address to a Calgary rally. When the premier expressed interest in a statement of Social Credit principles by Major Douglas in London and said he believed it would be a good thing if every Alberta newspaper published it, the Herald printed the statement. Letters from Social Crediters regularly appeared in the newspaper's letters section. In sum, the record suggests the Herald had a good deal of supporting evidence when it claimed that no government in the history of Alberta or any other province "has been accorded so much free space as the newspapers of Alberta...have given the 'social credit' administra-

tion."[40] But opportunities to present the official viewpoint were not restricted to the space offered in the opposition press.

Social Credit also had its own daily newspaper to spread the word. Under Aberhart's guidance, the party made arrangements shortly after the election to acquire control of the Albertan through the purchase of stock. The scheme eventually failed because depression-hit Social Crediters could not find sufficient money,[41] but for at least two years the party had a daily newspaper on its side, praising and encouraging the government and attacking administration critics. For Aberhart, acquisition of the Albertan was a matter of high priority. With the help of Manning and other members of the legislature, the premier earnestly urged party faithful to support the newspaper. On one occasion, Aberhart devoted an entire mid-week radio speech to promoting the Albertan. On Saturdays, the Albertan carried as a supplement the Alberta Social Credit Chronicle, which promoted the government cause with headlines like "Social Credit Will Light Lamp of Joy in Many Lives."[42] In addition to the Albertan and its weekly supplement, the party could count on several other publications, including one printed in Ukrainian.[43]

Radio, however, remained Aberhart's main channel of communication with his followers. Through his regular Sunday broadcasts and a mid-week program, the premier kept in direct touch with Social Crediters across the province, telling them what the government was trying to accomplish, relating the difficulties, and striking back at those who criticised his efforts.[44] He urged ordinary members of the party as

well as members of the legislature to tune in every Sunday so that "I can get my messages to you promptly...in connection with the establishment of Social Credit."[45] He found little need to speak in the legislature because, he said, he could reach the public by radio.[46]

With radio and its own publications, plus the space provided by the newspapers lined up against it, Social Credit should have been well represented in the market place of ideas where public opinion is formed. If it was not, the fault lies not in the lack of opportunity but rather in the weakness of the government's own case and its inability to make the best use of the resources available to put forward that case. Aberhart, for example, was a master at ridiculing and attacking the newspapers, at building up resentment against them, but he apparently was incapable of countering press criticism with reasoned answers; he had to rely on emotional appeals. As for the Albertan, Hargrave believed it was armed with a "cardboard sword...utterly unable to put up an effective fight against the anti-Social Credit press."[47] In this way, the government allowed newspaper attacks "to go by default."[48]

The preceding pages have attempted to show that, on the basis of charges made against the newspapers, the Social Credit government had little justificiation for introducing its press legislation. Further evidence to support this argument can be found in the "offences" that apparently prompted Aberhart to move against the press.

When the legislation was introduced, the premier told his Sunday broadcast audience that his government hoped by sane and careful action

to ensure the people had the truth on "matters of grave public importance."[49] But the two front page stories in the Journal that spurred Aberhart to promise legislative action, while they may have provided grounds for legitimate complaint, did not touch upon matters of grave public importance.[50] They did, however, reflect on Aberhart personally and on the premiership.

One item, three paragraphs in all, incorrectly stated that the Peace River School board had refused to allow school children to greet the premier during his visit to that community. The second, appearing four days later, described how N. J. Tall of Medicine Hat, who had recently been named Alberta's trade commissioner in Montreal, first met Aberhart in a railway sleeping car a year earlier. According to the story, when Aberhart found two strangers sleeping in his lower berth, Tall offered him his own lower berth and took the upper. The next morning the two men introduced themselves.

The stories enraged the premier, who described them in his Sunday broadcast, claiming both were false.[51] He was particularly incensed at what he considered a hint of patronage in the Medicine Hat story. When his audience at the Bible Institute applauded his suggestion for licensing the press, Aberhart promised to give the matter early attention on his return from a West Coast holiday.[52]

If the arguments presented so far refute the administration's case against the press, then other reasons must be found for the government's decision to bring in the Accurate News and Information Act. It is possible to see several motives behind the decision--Social Credit's ob-

session with propaganda, a desire for revenge, and the need to find a scapegoat. Each of these will be examined in turn. But the chief factor, it is contended, stems from the inability of Aberhart and his followers to accept criticism and unfavorable publicity. Because the criticism and publicity exposed embarrassingly the weaknesses of both the leader and the whole Social Credit dream, the government moved to gain some control over those chiefly responsible for its discomfiture, the one hundred-odd daily and weekly Alberta newspapers. It thus hoped to bring the hostile press into line.

Aberhart had a sharply-honed appreciation of propaganda, which is understandable, considering the effective use he made of it, through broadcasts and pamphlets, to lead his party to its electoral triumph in 1935. It is indicative of the premier's determination to spread the Social Credit version of the truth that one of the first major items of business to receive his attention once he took office was the proposed acquisition of the Albertan. Propaganda was very much a part of the Social Credit program. In the spring of 1935, when Major Douglas submitted to the UFA government his "First Interim Report on the Possibilities of the Application of Social Credit Principles to the Province of Alberta," the first of three preliminary steps he recommended was the "systematic provision of a News circulation system under the unchallengeable control of the province, particularly in regard to radio facilities...."[53] Earlier in this chapter it was shown that numerous propaganda channels were open to Social Crediters during the government's first years to present their views and to argue their case.

However, even with all these available opportunities, the government no doubt saw the propaganda potential in exerting a degree of control over all the daily and weekly newspapers in the province. Under the Accurate News and Information Act, a newspaper would be forced to give the government free space to carry administration statements to "correct" or "amplify" articles or editorials dealing with the government which the newspaper had published earlier. Here, then, was the ultimate in free publicity for a government that never tired of propagating the Social Credit gospel and its own view of events.

Another factor that probably played a part in the government's decision to move against the press was simply a desire to "get even" with the newspapers, to settle the score with a persistent foe. It was not the practice of Aberhart and other Social Crediters to counter criticism and dissent with explanations, arguments and reasoned defences. They preferred to strike back at those who did not agree with them. When members of the legislature stepped out of line, they found themselves expelled from caucus. In another field, two magistrates and a justice of the peace were dismissed, without an opportunity to defend themselves, for allegedly expressing in private their disagreement with administration policies. And before the legislation was introduced to control the press, Social Crediters tried other methods to get back at the newspapers opposed to the government. Aberhart, for example, continued his pre-election boycott campaign against the Herald, urging readers and advertisers alike to abandon the newspaper.[54] In Bonnyville, district Social Crediters passed a resolution notifying the

editor of the Bonnyville Nouvelle that unless he discontinued "knocking the government," they would try to get all party supporters to cancel their subscriptions and boycott advertisers.[55] Thus the Accurate News and Information Act was entirely in keeping with the government's treatment of those who opposed the official position. This vindictive attitude can be seen in the words of Public Works Minister W. A. Fallow, who, in referring to the unfavorable reception given the scrip plan by newspapers, wholesalers and manufacturers, told a meeting in Vermilion: "They are giving us a rough ride just now, but it is nothing like the ride they are going to get before we are through."[56] When the press bill was before the Agricultural Committee for discussion, a columnist for the Social Credit newspaper wrote that some members were almost "rubbing their hand with glee at the prospect of holding an inquisition, with a delegation of publishers as the writhing victims."[57]

The Accurate News and Information Act may also have been prompted by a desire to make the press a scapegoat for the troubles besetting the government. The 1935 election gave Social Credit the kind of popular mandate that most political parties only dream about. Once in office, however, Aberhart and his cabinet soon found there was a world of difference between promising a new economic order and actually establishing one. The first years saw the administration subjected to all kinds of strain and buffeting. One setback followed another. With problems piling up and the Social Credit millennium apparently as distant as ever, what could be more natural for a beleagured government

than to look for someone to blame? And what better scapegoat than the hated press? According to one newspaperman who reported government affairs at the time, Aberhart claimed the press was "responsible for most of the government's problems."[58] Other members of the cabinet also pointed accusing fingers at the newspapers. Municipal Affairs Minister Lucien Maynard said that if the government's prosperity bond scheme (scrip) failed, the capitalistic press would be to blame.[59] Implicit in the Accurate News and Information Act was the message that the government's performance would improve once the opposition newspapers had been dealt with.

But these motives--a compelling urge to propagate the Social Credit gospel, the desire for revenge, a perceived need to shift blame--while they may have contributed to the decision, do not by themselves appear strong enough to have made the government willing to risk a showdown with the press. The main motive had to be one that was equal to the risk. What, then, would drive the government to attempt to gain some control over the newspapers? To discover the answer requires only a brief look at Aberhart and his followers, the government's performance during its first years in office, and the effect of all the poor publicity and critical comments in the press.

The preceding chapter brought out the sensitivity of Aberhart and other Social Crediters to criticism and differing opinions, showing how intolerant they were towards those marching to another drummer. This characteristic attitude clearly manifested itself in 1935 during what should have been a happy period for the party, when the movement was

sweeping the province and everything was building towards a tremendous victory at the polls. But if Social Crediters took umbrage at press criticism when things were going well, they could be counted on to react even more strongly when events took a downward turn--which they most assuredly did after Aberhart and his colleagues assumed office.

The downward turn began when the government's chief adviser in preparing a Social Credit plan, Major Douglas, who was based in London, resigned after protracted and unseemly long-distance wrangling with Aberhart. More misfortune soon followed. Backbenchers angered over the government's reluctance to implement its election program staged a revolt and almost brought the administration crashing down. Cabinet ministers resigned. A highly-touted scrip plan was an ignominous failure and had to be abandoned after three months. Debt payments were defaulted. Aberhart was forced to make a humiliating admission of his failure to bring in a Social Credit program within eighteen months as promised. Key legislation was either disallowed by the federal government or ruled ultra vires by the courts. The promised monthly dividends did not materialize. By September, 1937, thousands of people were attending public meetings throughout the province demanding Aberhart's resignation, and in his own constituency of Okotoks-High River names were rapidly being collected to have him recalled.[60]

The problems and setbacks of the early years were front page news in Alberta. Coupled with the editorial comments, they stripped away the pretence from both Aberhart and his Social Credit plan. In one of his Sunday broadcast attacks on the press, in which he urged both

readers and advertisers to withdraw their support, Aberhart said the longer people continued to "let themselves be duped" by what they read in the newspapers, the less chance there was of doing anything for them.[61] But this was a Social Credit interpretation. What seemed to be happening was just the opposite: newspaper reports of the government's performance made it more difficult for Aberhart himself to "dupe" the people who looked to him for guidance. The reassuring talk and easy promises of the election campaign and the opening months of the new administration had built up expectations. But the newspapers were showing a government that was confused and maladroit, with no real idea of where it was going or what it should be doing. The press, in other words, was exposing Social Credit: there was no magical cure for the depression malady; the great messiah had feet of clay.

Aberhart and his followers--full of self-righteousness, their minds firmly closed--could not allow this steady assault on Social Credit to go unanswered. The whole movement depended on complete and unbending faith in the leader and his plan for economic salvation. For Aberhart, with his extremely thin skin, there was also a great deal of vanity involved. He was no longer a school principal but the head of the provincial government, an ego-inflating position that no doubt made him more sensitive than ever to any suggestion of serious shortcomings in his makeup. The headlines, however, shouted these shortcomings, and the critical editorials echoed the message.

The problem for Aberhart was how to deal with all this unfavorable publicity that was making him and the Social Credit movement look so

ridiculous in the eyes of the public. It has already been shown that the administration's propaganda efforts to counter the bad press were not very effective. And Aberhart's repeated threats of legislative action, while they caused some anxiety among publishers and editors, did not silence the press. Stronger measures were obviously needed.

The Accurate News and Information Act can be seen, then, as a move by a desperate government to deal with a press that was seen as shattering illusions about Social Credit and demolishing the reputation of the man who was looked on by the faithful as a savior. What the legislation tried to do was to bring the newspapers under government control by threats of punishment against those who criticised or questioned Aberhart and his Social Credit plan. No such intention was suggested by the government, of course, in its attempt to justify the measure. But the provisions of the act clearly were designed for something much more than trying to ensure accurate published accounts of government business. The evidence points to an attempt to muzzle the hostile newspapers, to put an end to, or at least curtail, the all-too-accurate stories and editorials that were destroying the credibility of Aberhart, his government and the Social Credit movement. The next chapter will examine the legislation in detail and discuss its significance.

FOOTNOTES

[1]From an address to the Edmonton Prophetic Bible Conference. Calgary Daily Herald, October 19, 1936.

[2]W. H. Kesterton, A History of Journalism in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1967), pp. 227-228.

[3]In a letter to Major Douglas in London about a month after the election, Aberhart said that so far the newspapers had been "very friendly to us indeed...." C. H. Douglas, The Alberta Experiment (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937), p. 136.

[4]Calgary Daily Herald, August 27, 1935.

[5]Letter to D. Seaton Thompson, Lacombe, November 5, 1935. Premier's Papers, Alberta Government Archives (hereafter called the Archives).

[6]Interview, June 21, 1977.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Calgary Albertan, June 1, 1936.

[9]Okotoks Review, August 7, 1936.

[10]This kind of editorial support may have perplexed Social Crediters. According to Manning, it was "something of a standing joke within the government and our members that if we ever got a favorable comment in the leading dailies we had done something wrong and had better reasses our position." Interview, June 21, 1977.

[11]Calgary Daily Herald, February 7, 1936.

[12]Ibid., March 3, 1936.

[13]The Herald reinforced its written comments with a series of acerbic cartoons by Stewart Cameron, who, according to a former news editor of the newspaper, was hired "to ridicule the premier in every way possible." C. H. Stout, Backtrack on Old Trails: Memoirs of an International Life of 91 Years--79 in Alberta (Calgary: Lorne Stout, 1973), p. 286.

[14]Edmonton Journal, June 12, 1936.

[15]Calgary Daily Herald, April 15, 1937.

[16]The People's Weekly was the new name given the Alberta Labor News.

[17]From the diary of John Hargrave. Edmonton Journal, August 3, 1937.

[18]Calgary Daily Herald, January 18, 1936.

[19]Calgary Albertan, July 13, 1936.

[20]Transcript of broadcast to the Edmonton Prophetic Bible Conference, January 9, 1938. Private Collection, Social Credit Holdings (Mrs. R. J. Dinning), Archives. Hereafter the papers in this group are called the Dinning Collection.

[21]Letter to A. P. Clutterbuck, Vancouver, June 1, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[22]Letter from J. E. McInnes, Calgary, January 7, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[23]Transcript from Dinning Collection, Archives.

[24]Letter from H. T. Halliwell, Coleman, Association president, October 10, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Letter from Halliwell, October 20, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[27]Edmonton Journal, August 24, 1937.

[28]There were exceptions. During a broadcast from Calgary on August 23, 1936, Aberhart referred to a story in the Journal which stated that residents of Drumheller were discounting prosperity certificates. The premier said there was not a "single vestige of truth" in the report, which cited cases of people selling or attempting to sell the certificates below face value. Dinning Collection, Archives. In an October broadcast the same year, Aberhart suggested a Herald story about the outflow of funds from the province had actually started the run on the money. The newspaper said Aberhart should check with the banks and trust companies. "Let him learn the facts before he speaks; and let us have an end of this everlasting trial by radio." Calgary Daily Herald, October 13, 1936.

[29]Letter to Mrs. F. S. Meyers, Bonnyville, November 17, 1935. Premier's Papers, Archives. Manning offers the following explanation of why the government did not take the newspapers to court: "What chance

has the average person or, for that matter, even a government? (A government wouldn't normally stoop to it anyway.) Libel actions against the media: your chances of successfully winning them in this country are one in a thousand, because everything's stacked against you--the argument of the freedom of the press, the right to know, and all that stuff. Secondly, all you do is sell a lot more papers by giving a lot more publicity to the thing you are talking about. And thirdly, when it's all over, what have you accomplished? They turn right around and do the same thing...." Interview, June 21, 1977.

[30]Ironically, the only court case arising out of what was published in that era appears to be one in which two prominent Social Crediters were jailed for defamatory libel. In 1937 a pamphlet printed in Edmonton referred to "Bankers' Toadies" and urged their extermination. The names of nine well-known Edmonton businessmen were listed on the other side of the pamphlet. G. F. Powell, a government adviser from Wales sent to Alberta by Major Douglas, was sentenced to six months at hard labor for his part in preparing the pamphlet, while J. L. Unwin, Government Whip, received three months at hard labor.

[31]Edmonton Journal, August 24, 1937.

[32]Later that year, Aberhart apparently believed he had discovered a guide to the legislation he wanted. In a newspaper report of a case in London, Britain's Attorney-General, Sir Donald Somervell, stated that the accused proprietor and printer of a certain publication had "exceeded by far the license allowed the press." Aberhart immediately wrote Somervell, requesting "a copy of your Act in connection with the licensing of the press." The Attorney-General replied that, although correctly quoted in the newspaper, he was "not referring to any Act of Parliament, but to the Common Law as to seditious libel and public mischief." There was, he added, "no Act of Parliament that regulates the matter." Letters, November 3, 1936, and November 17, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[33]Hargrave diary, Edmonton Journal, August 3, 1937.

[34]Letter from F. P. Galbraith, Red Deer, October 30, 1935. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Edmonton Journal, August 13, 1937.

[37]J. R. Mallory, Social Credit and the Federal Power in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1954), p. 78.

[38]Calgary Daily Herald, October 29, 1936.

[39]On one occasion, the Herald followed to the letter Aberhart's instructions on how a particular statement was to be treated. At the end of February, 1937, the premier told his Sunday audience that the government had failed to keep its promise to introduce Social Credit within eighteen months, and asked party groups to decide whether the government should continue or resign. He opened his statement with: "I am not resigning. Put that down first." The next day the Herald story on the announcement began: "Premier William Aberhart is not resigning." Calgary Daily Herald, March 1, 1937.

[40]Ibid., October 12, 1937.

[41]N. E. Tanner, who was Speaker of the House, organized the campaign to sell Albertan stock to party supporters. After visiting some communities in the south of the province, he wrote Aberhart that the people "seem to be sympathetic but unable to raise any cash to assist the move." The premier replied: "It is most important...that we get busy and sell enough stock to make the deal possible. We cannot overemphasize the importance of this paper to us." Letters, April 27, 1936, and May 2, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[42]Calgary Albertan, July 18, 1936.

[43]Among the newspapers and magazines were Alberta Social Credit Clarion, Alberta Social Credit Commentator, Today and Tomorrow, Commonsense Social Credit.

[44]Social Crediters, who were so eager to impose controls on the press, found themselves defending freedom of expression when an attempt was made by the newly-formed anti-government People's League to prohibit the premier from using his Sunday religious broadcasts for political purposes. In response to a League resolution to the federal government, a group in Maloy drafted a resolution urging Aberhart "be allowed to broadcast what, when and where he chooses." Letter from Mrs. F. S. Myers, Maloy, to J. W. Beaudry, MLA for St. Paul, September 14, 1937. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[45]Transcript of broadcast to the Edmonton Prophetic Bible Conference, June 28, 1936. Dinning Collection, Archives.

[46]C. B. Macpherson, Democracy in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953), p. 166.

[47]Hargrave diary, Edmonton Journal, August 3, 1937.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Calgary Albertan, October 4, 1937.

[50]The Social Credit newspaper termed the stories "small fry." Ibid., September 16, 1936.

[51]It was one of the rare occasions when Aberhart was fairly specific in his complaint. Although he did not name the Journal, there was no doubt about which newspaper he had in mind. A day before the broadcast the premier told a reporter he would "fix the Journal" for the story on Tall. Edmonton Journal, September 14, 1936.

[52]The Journal carried a lengthy report on the premier's attack and his licensing proposal. At the end of the report the newspaper said its regular Peace River correspondent sent the story on the school children after being told by a member of the Social Credit executive that the school board had refused to let the students greet Aberhart. The Journal stated that it had since received word from the school board denying the board had refused permission. As for the other story, the Journal said it came from its regular Medicine Hat correspondent. The newspaper said the story in no way suggested the train incident was connected with Tall's appointment. This statement regarding Tall, however, strains credulity. If no inference of patronage was intended, it is difficult to find any justification for publishing the story, unless the Journal was attempting to ridicule the premier by describing his misadventure in a sleeping car.

[53]Douglas, Alberta Experiment, p. 118.

[54]Figures supplied by the Herald show a marked decline in the newspaper's circulation during this period. For a six-month period ending March 31, 1935, circulation stood at 32,187. A year later it was 29,887, and in 1937 it had fallen to 26,983. Aberhart, with characteristic hyperbole, suggested circulation had dropped by nearly fifty per cent. To counter the premier's campaign, the newspaper began running a series of institutional advertisements, pointing out among other things that the Herald contributed more than half a million dollars to Calgary and district in wages, taxes and other payments.

[55]Bonnyville Nouvelle, September 18, 1937. In October, the newspaper reported that one of its "largest and most consistent" advertisers was forced to discontinue his contract because of pressure from Social Credit customers. Ibid., October 23, 1937.

[56]Calgary Daily Herald, July 29, 1936.

[57]Calgary Albertan, October 4, 1937.

[58]Fred Kennedy, Alberta Was My Beat (Calgary: The Albertan, 1975), p. 250.

[59]Calgary Albertan, July 10, 1936.

[60]In 1936 the government passed a controversial bill permitting the recall of a member of the legislature on petition from two-thirds of the voters listed in the constituency. When the premier first heard of the move in Okotoks-High River, he welcomed it, saying it gave the electors of his riding an opportunity to declare themselves either for the financiers or for the common people. Later, however, when it appeared the number of petitioners would reach the required two-thirds of the voters, the legislature abruptly repealed the recall measure.

[61]Transcript of broadcast to the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, July 19, 1936. Dinning Collection, Archives.

CHAPTER V

THE ACCURATE NEWS AND INFORMATION ACT

> Why whould freedom of speech and freedom of press be allowed? Why should a government which is doing what it believes to be right allow itself to be criticized? It would not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal things than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinions calculated to embarrass the government?
>
> --V. I. Lenin[1]

After months of threats, the Alberta government moved to take legislative action against the tormenting press on September 30, 1937, when it introduced the Accurate News and Information Act. This was one of three highly-contentious measures rushed through a special session of the legislature that year. The second was a new version of the Credit of Alberta Regulation Act, which slightly altered the wording of a similarly-titled act which had been disallowed by the federal government earlier in the year. The Bank Taxation Act, the third piece of legislation, was the Social Credit government's attempt to exact additional revenue from the despised financial institutions. All acts became the central topic of a federal-provincial dispute with the Alberta Lieutenant-Governor, J. C. Bowen, unexpectedly decided to reserve the measures for consideration by the federal government.[2] Eventually, the question of the constitutionality of the acts was referred to the Supreme Court of Canada. In March, 1938, the court unanimously ruled all the legislation ultra vires, along with a measure providing the

overall framework for some of the legislation, the Alberta Social Credit Act.[3] At no time was the Accurate News and Information Act in force in Alberta, although initially only the Lieutenant-Governor's refusal to give assent kept it from taking effect. But the measure brought in by the government and passed by the legislature showed just how Aberhart and his fellow Social Crediters intended to deal with the press.

This chapter focuses on the Accurate News and Information Act and its significance in terms of the threat it posed to a democratic society. As well, further evidence is offered to show that the Social Credit administration could not justify its action against the press. The act had two major objectives--to spread Social Credit propaganda and to control what was said about the government in the newspapers. The first goal, which would have seen newspapers forced to print official comments on press stories and editorials, shows how far Aberhart was prepared to go in his determined campaign to propagate the Social Credit view. With the second goal, it is suggested, the Aberhart administration was moving in the direction of authoritarian rule. By attempting to muzzle the press, the government sought to restrict public debate on its policies and activities, a move wholly in character for someone as dogmatic as Aberhart but completely contrary to the democratic concept. A portion of the chapter is devoted to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, which, in finding the legislation ultra vires, stressed the importance of open and full discussion of public affairs in the Canadian system.

The preamble to the Accurate News and Information Act said it was expedient and in the public interest that newspapers should publish statements made by the authority of the government regarding the "true and exact objects of the policy of the Government and as to the hindrances or difficulties in achieving such objects," so that the people might be informed about these matters.[4] There were three major sections in the legislation, which covered only two-and-one-half pages.

First, the act stipulated that Alberta newspapers, dailies and weeklies, must publish statements provided by the chairman of the Social Credit Board for the purpose of correcting or amplifying statements published earlier in those newspapers relating to policies or activities of the government. The statements were to be printed in the same type as the original ones and were to be given the same prominence. Each would carry a notice at the end saying it was published by the direction of the board chairman.[5] Under the terms of the act, no libel action could be instituted against a newspaper as a result of publishing the government statement.

A second section compelled newspapers, on written request from the board chairman, to reveal the source of any item published within the previous sixty days. Names, addresses and occupations of all persons who supplied information were to be given to the chairman, along with the names and addresses of the writers responsible for the article or editorial in question. This information was to be supplied within twenty-four hours from the time newspapers received the chairman's

request.

Penalties for contravention of the above regulations made up the third section of the legislation. On the recommendation of the board chairman, the cabinet could by order prohibit:

> 1. Publication of the offending newspaper for a definite time or "until further order";
>
> 2. Publication in any newspaper of anything written by a person specified in the order;
>
> 3. Publication of "any information emanating from any person or source specified in the order."[6]

These penalties applied to the editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper guilty of contravening the act. Another clause, applying to every person failing to comply with provisions of the act, set out a fine of up to five hundred dollars. The maximum fine for not obeying the cabinet's prohibition on publishing was one thousand dollars.

Newspapers across the country and in Britain condemned the act. In Alberta, dailies and weeklies lined up together to oppose it, submitting a joint statement to the legislature's Agricultural Committee.[7] The Herald accused the administration of attempting to prevent the public from reading "any statements about the government which are not concocted by its own propaganda bureau."[8] Even the self-proclaimed Social Credit daily attacked the measure; the Albertan said the government had been abused and criticised by newspapers to a point almost beyond endurance, but laws against freedom of speech or expression were the "first move to end democracy."[9]

The aim of the Accurate News and Information Act was, in the words of the preamble, to furnish Albertans with the true and exact object of government policy and to inform them of difficulties encountered in pursuit of government goals. Implicit in this is the suggestion that Albertans were being deprived of accurate information on these matters. Thus the Aberhart administration was following through on its charge that Alberta newspapers were giving their readers a false picture of what the government was doing and the problems it was experiencing. However, this purported objective of the legislation does not stand up to close scrutiny.

For one thing, as was shown in the previous chapter, the government, for all its repeated charges against the press, was able to produce little evidence of lying or misrepresentation by the newspapers--certainly not enough, it is contended, to warrant severe press legislation. This damaging deficiency in the administration's case was underscored when the Accurate News and Information Act was debated in the legislature. If ever there was a time to expose the faults and shortcomings of the Alberta newspapers, this was surely it. Example after example should have been given to show how the press had abused its freedom by publishing false and misleading accounts of the government. This would have at least made credible the administration's claim that some kind of legislative action was required to ensure a higher standard of work by the newspapers.

But in trying to justify in the House the proposed action against the press, Social Crediters were anything but convincing. Aberhart,

the most bitter and persistent denigrator of the press, did not even participate in the debate. This was the man who had led the attack on the newspapers, who had flung charges at them week after week in his Sunday broadcasts, whose decision it was to bring in legislation against them. But now, at the climactic moment of his long campaign against the press, he had nothing to say, leaving it to his colleagues to make the government's case. Those who did take part in the debate offered lame excuses for the measure, evaded the issues or reverted to the familiar sweeping accusations that lacked substantiation. The main government speaker, Provincial Treasurer Solon Low, gave a perverse twist to the government's motives by contending the legislation was actually designed to help publishers--they would be "absolutely certain that they...(had) an absolutely reliable source of information."[10] The treasurer did not attempt to cite any of the many lies supposedly published about the Social Credit government, but he did give "one of the finest examples" of newspaper misrepresentation--coverage of the Lindbergh kidnapping trial in the United States.[11] Government Whip J. H. Unwin also went afield in making a case against the press, relating complaints by the prime minister of New Zealand about not being fairly reported. Mrs. Edith Gostick, an MLA for Calgary, spoke of "malicious statements of untruth and misrepresentation," but she supplied no examples.[12] Public Works Minister W. A. Fallow, who said the premier had been subjected to unfair tactics, saw the Accurate News and Information Act in these terms:

> We protect the rights of our citizens here by compelling a

> balogna manufacturer to place the stamp on every article of balogna for human consumption.[13]

Only one Social Credit member offered a specific example of what he believed was a press misdemeanor. R. E. Ansley of Leduc charged that during the second session, in August, newspaper headlines suggested the government's new banking legislation would bring confiscation of deposits. When the premier issued a statement denying this was the intention--claiming, in fact, the purpose was "directly against such a thing"--the Journal published Aberhart's statement in an "off-hand corner on Page Seven."[14] That proved, said Ansley, that "they do not take statements of correction."[15]

The second point that needs to be made about the ostensible object of the press legislation is that the record of Aberhart and his government raises doubts as to whether the Social Credit administration was seriously concerned about truth and accuracy. The premier and his ministers engaged in all kinds of misrepresentation and deception themselves during their first years in office, twisting the facts to suit their own purposes. A few examples make the point. The government insisted almost up to the time of Aberhart's admission of failure that establishment of a Social Credit system was proceeding on schedule, with ministers occasionally claiming they were making better progress than anticipated. Again, when newspapers said the government planned to pay roadworkers with scrip, both Aberhart and Public Works Minister Fallow denied the story, but within two months the scheme was announced officially.[16] Aberhart repeatedly said he would continue only so long

as the people wanted him, but when petitioners in his constituency attempted to force him out through his own recall legislation, the government quickly repealed the measure and the premier stayed on. The master propagandist turned a rally of two thousand to four thousand Calgarians (according to estimates made by several people) into a crowd of twenty thousand, petitioning the prime minister of Canada to "submit to the will of the people of Alberta."[17] In dealing with the Accurate News and Information Act, the People's Weekly said that mistakes were made by the press and sometimes news was distorted, suppressed or invented. However, "more false statements have been made by government members, including the Premier, than have appeared in all of the one hundred newspapers in the province."[18]

Certainly this was a strange record for a government supposedly so concerned about the truth. But, of course, it was not the truth that Aberhart's administration sought. As we have seen, it was the truth that was hurting so much, revealing the ineptitude of the government and the emptiness of the Social Credit scheme. One Social Crediter who wrote to the premier to complain about the press said members of the party "want the 'Truth' as it is the 'Truth' that will set us free."[19] What he wanted--and what Aberhart wanted--was really just the Social Credit "truth" in which everything worked out according to the master plan drawn up by the leader himself, with no differing points of view to contend with.

Two quite separate goals can be seen in the Accurate News and Information Act. One is concerned with propaganda, the other with reg-

ulating what was published about the government.

On the surface, the legislation was primarily a measure to bolster the administration's unceasing efforts to get its message across to the people of Alberta and to spread the Social Credit doctrine. As such, it can be viewed, in the least critical light, as the work of over-zealous party proselytizers. Propaganda, as was shown earlier, played an important part in Social Credit's rapid rise to power, and the lesson was never forgotten by Aberhart and those around him. In office, however, Social Credit's propaganda efforts failed to counter or neutralize the massive amount of unfavorable publicity the government received in the press. With the Accurate News and Information Act, the administration tried a new approach. The provision forcing newspapers to give the government free space to correct or amplify earlier articles or editorials would have cleared the way for a stream of official statements covering virtually every aspect of public affairs. This was the way Aberhart liked to get his message to Albertans--direct from leader to the people, with no intermediaries like reporters or editorial writers who might supply embarrassing additional information or raise awkward questions. The press would have been turned into an "instrument of Social Credit propaganda."[20]

The second goal of the act carried more serious implications. Here the government sought to bring the press under official control, in an attempt to muzzle the unfriendly newspapers. Aberhart was not satisfied with merely increasing the government's propaganda; he wanted to silence his critics as well, to suppress the unfavorable

stories and questioning editorials that were making the administration look so inept. Here Aberhart was turning away from the democratic system, with its tradition of free and open public debate, and moving in the direction of the Fascist governments in Germany and Italy, where the press was tightly controlled. Alberta newspapers claimed the measure would have "imposed a dictatorship over the press" and denied people the right to receive uncensored news of their government.[21] Aberhart's purpose was unmistakable. A government desiring only free space to publicise its views and to "correct" the record would not have found it necessary to demand the right to obtain the names, addresses and occupations of persons who wrote or supplied information for the stories and editorials in the newspapers. The obvious explanation for this provision in the act is that the government intended to take action against such persons if the articles or editorials were considered too unfavorable to the Social Credit cause.

We can only speculate on the kind of action the administration had in mind, but it has already been shown that on other occasions critics and dissidents were deprived of their jobs, expelled from caucus or subjected to boycotts. It is worth noting that at about the same time as the Accurate News and Information Act was introduced the government brought in legislation to license a wide variety of businesses and trades. This measure also gave the minister of trade and industry power to license

> ...all persons engaged or employed in any business or any description or class thereof so designated and (to) prohibit the carrying on of that business or the engagement in that business

> by any person who is required to be licensed and who is not so licensed....[22]

Given the vindictive nature of Aberhart and other Social Crediters, it is easy to imagine Albertans losing their jobs or their businesses for giving information to the newspapers. Journalists presumably would have been subjected to the same kind of treatment for writing articles that put the government in a bad light or editorials that were critical of the administration. Even without the licensing bill, however, the government had the power to harass or inflict punishment on those it wished to hurt.[23] As for the newspapers, if they persisted in using unidentified sources, the choice was stark: either supply the names on demand or face the possibility of being shut down by the government.

In sum, the Alberta government was attempting to dictate to the press through the threat of retaliation for any unfavorable publicity. Certainly the numerous unnamed sources in or close to the government on whom newspapers relied for a good deal of information would be most reluctant to talk to reporters if they might subsequently be identified and face dismissal.[24] Editorial writers and reporters would by necessity have to weigh carefully the personal consequences in store before writing anything the government might consider critical or embarrassing.

In defending the legislation, the government said it was not attempting to muzzle the press; newspapers remained free to print what they liked. However, the provisions in the act appear to have been aimed at making the newspapers print what the government liked--or pay

the penalty. The situation was not far from what the Herald anticipated when Aberhart announced in 1936 his intention of bringing in a press licensing system. The Herald said it would be easy for a newspaper to avoid difficulties.

> All it need do is agree with Mr. Aberhart, praise Mr. Aberhart, approve of every government policy, right or wrong, suppress any fact relating to a mistake or a failure or a scandal in government circles, and color all the facts it did publish with a strong tinge of government propaganda.[25]

The premier's conception of how government news should be handled was demonstrated early in his first term when he and Provincial Secretary Ernest Manning met with some four hundred Edmonton and district wholesalers, retailers and manufacturers to discuss a proposed business code. The notice announcing the meeting said the session would be closed to the press, and the invited businessmen were requested "not to give publicity either to the meeting or what transpires thereat."[26] Any necessary publicity would be given out by the premier. Here was the typical approach by Aberhart, who was accustomed to running a one-man show. He would decide what publicity was necessary. There would be one, and only one, interpretation of what occurred at the meeting--his. Everyone else would fall into line, and the newspapers would report only what Aberhart told them, which in this particular instance turned out to be a five-sentence summary of the meeting.

What Aberhart was attempting to do through the Accurate News and Information Act was to stifle an important voice in the general discussion of public affairs, a discussion that constitutes an essential

element of any democratic system. In Alberta at that time the voice of the newspapers was particularly useful, expressing as it did the questions and doubts about Social Credit shared by a large part of the population. As an unofficial opposition, the press was far more effective in challenging the government, in holding Aberhart to account, than was the small official opposition in the legislature, which was dominated by the large Social Credit majority. Secondly, Aberhart was making extensive use of another medium of mass communication, transforming what was supposed to be a religious broadcast into a powerful weapon for political propaganda. The press provided a different view of the government from what the premier told his radio listeners, although, as was shown in the previous chapter, it gave Social Crediters ample opportunity to state their case. Under the Accurate News and Information Act, press opinion would have been muted, limiting the open and free discussion of matters affecting all Albertans.

The importance of public discussion in the Canadian system was stressed in the Supreme Court judgment on the press legislation. In examining the court's ruling, it is helpful to divide the judgment into two separate sections. The first is the finding of the majority of the court that the Accurate News and Information Act was ultra vires because it formed part of a general scheme of Social Credit legislation based on the Alberta Social Credit Act, a measure which the court ruled was beyond the province's competence. Because the Social Credit Act was ultra vires, "ancillary and dependent legislation must fall with it."[27] A minority opinion by Mr. Justice L. A. Cannon reached the

same conclusion about the constitutionality of the act by different reasoning. He held that freedom of the press in discussing public affairs and the right of citizens in this area were subjects of criminal law, a matter of federal jurisdiction. The Accurate News and Information Act was an attempt by the Alberta legislature to amend the Criminal Code and was therefore beyond the province's jurisdiction. Once the court found the press act ultra vires, Chief Justice Sir Lyman Duff, speaking for the majority, said there were "some further observations" to be made on the measure.[28] These observations dealt with the question of public discussion in the Canadian system. They make up the second section of the judgment.

Chief Justice Duff said the British North America Act, aiming for a constitution similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom, contemplated a Parliament working under the influence of public opinion and public discussion. Such an institution derived its efficacy from

> ...the free public discussion of affairs, from criticism and answer and counter-criticism, from attack upon policy and administration and defence and counter-attack; from the freest and fullest analysis and examination from every point of view of political proposals.[29]

The right of free public discussion of public affairs--"notwithstanding its incidental mischiefs"--was the "breath of life for parliamentary institutions."[30] The Chief Justice said everybody would concede to the provinces a degree of regulation of newspapers. But the limit was reached when the legislation

> ...effects such a curtailment of the exercise of the right of public discussion as substantially to interfere with the working of the parliamentary institutions of Canada as contemplated by the...British North America Act and the statutes of the Dominion of Canada.[31]

Social Crediters, however, did not see free public discussion as the breath of life of parliamentary institutions. From the party's earliest days in Alberta, when Aberhart was just getting the movement under way, supporters rejected discussion of policies and debate on issues. There was always only one right policy, and that was the one laid down by Aberhart, who, as a preacher and former school principal, was not accustomed to having his word challenged. This attitude carried over to the days of Social Credit government, with the leader himself setting the example for his flock in smug intolerance. Aberhart seemingly could not grasp the notion of debate and discussion as an essential part of democratic government. The fact that he avoided participating in debates in the legislature, preferring to speak to the people by radio (with only his views expressed), indicates a lack of understanding of and concern for the democratic process. As for the newspapers, he apparently did not see any use for them other than to carry Social Credit propaganda. In all his many references to the press there appears to be no mention of newspapers playing a valuable role in a democratic system by providing an independent view of the government, by raising issues and by serving as a forum for debate. Such a role was of no value to a leader who steadfastly believed there was only one correct viewpoint--his own. The government's rigidly narrow approach was summed up by Mr. Justice Cannon. Obviously the credit

scheme of the Aberhart administration would not succeed unless everyone could be induced to believe in it and help it along, so it was therefore necessary to control the sources of information to keep Albertans "immune from any vacilation in their absolute faith" in the government's plan.[32] The Social Credit doctrine "must become, for the people of Alberta, a sort of religious dogma of which a free and uncontrolled discussion is not permissible."[33] Mr. Justice Cannon said the pith and substance of the Accurate News and Information Act was to regulate the Alberta press from the viewpoint of public policy by preventing the public from being misled or deceived as to any policy or activity of the Social Credit government and "by reducing any opposition to silence or bring upon it ridicule and public contempt."[34]

The attitude of Social Credit towards discussion of public affairs is indicated by Manning's reply to a Herald editorial commenting on the absence of a definite plan in enabling legislation introduced in March, 1936. The provincial secretary thought it would be foolish for the government to make details public so that "our enemies would have further means of attacking us."[35] Manning apparently could not see the possibility of any worthwhile contribution being made through criticism and debate. Those who might raise questions or find fault were enemies, and any differing viewpoint constituted an attack on the government.

Had the Accurate News and Information Act become law, it would have changed the whole concept of a free press in a democratic society and thus altered the democratic system itself. Despite assurances by

Aberhart and other members of the government that the legislation would not interfere with the liberty of the press, Alberta newspapers no longer would have been free to express their views on government affairs, to question and criticise proposals they considered harmful. The act was designed to regulate newspapers "to the satisfaction of the...Social Credit government."[36] In effect, the Accurate News and Information Act would have turned back history, by reinstituting a system under which newspapers were punished for publishing material unfavorable to the ruling authorities. Provisions for disclosure of names, coupled with the penalty clauses, would have imposed considerable restraint on the press, as shown earlier, giving the Social Credit regime "effective control under the guise of fairness."[37] The logical extension of this kind of control could be seen in Nazi Germany. In 1933, an Editor's Law, drafted by the minister of propaganda and enlightenment, Joseph Goebbels, stipulated that all journalists had to register with the state, adopt the Nazi philosophy, and "do exactly as they were told."[38] Each newspaper had a chief editor who served as an official of the state, ensuring that "only material approved by Goebbels could be published."[39] When the Alberta press bill was introduced, a columnist for Social Credit's own newspaper wrote that the measure "succeeded in out-Hitlering Hitler."[40]

Drafted at about the same time as the sweeping legislation to license businesses and employees, the Accurate News and Information Act confirmed the worst suspicions of those who earlier had detected totalitarian tendencies in Aberhart's approach. While the government

was increasing its control over the individual citizen, it was also attempting to muffle one of the main voices of criticism, discussion and dissent. What the press act signalled in Alberta was a move away from the democratic system by an administration that simply could not come to terms with the open and free discussion of public affairs so essential to that system.

FOOTNOTES

[1]From a Moscow speech, 1920. Quoted in William J. Small, Political Power and the Press (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1972), p. 31. The author does not give a published source, and I was unable to locate the original.

[2]The Lieutenant-Governor paid for this action. Seven months later the legislature voted to stop paying expenses for his official residence, Government House, and the cabinet was directed not to pay his office expenses.

[3]Although the Alberta government appealed the Supreme Court ruling on all three bills, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council did not rule on the press act or the credit regulation act. These measures were under the authority of boards or commissions established by the Alberta Social Credit Act, and that act was repealed by the province before the appeal was heard in London. The Judicial Committee said the press and credit acts were rendered inoperative by this move.

[4]An Act to Ensure the Publication of Accurate News and Information, Alberta Legislature, 1937, Third Session.

[5]Originally, the act stipulated that daily newspapers would be compelled to provide up to a full page for any one statement and weeklies a maximum of one-tenth of a total issue. But this was amended to say the board's statement should not exceed the length of the statement it was correcting.

[6]An Act to Ensure the Publication of Accurate News and Information.

[7]Several amendments were subsequently made to the legislation, but the principle remained unchanged.

[8]Calgary Daily Herald, October 1, 1937.

[9]Calgary Albertan, October 4, 1937. In 1936, the Albertan began describing itself as "A Publicly Owned Newspaper Supporting Social Credit Principles."

[10]Edmonton Journal, October 5, 1937.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid. It proved no such thing. The Social Credit member apparently read the Journal the day after the banking legislation was introduced. On the day the measure was brought in, August 4, 1937, the newspaper published an extra edition in which the full text of the premier's statement was carried on Page One immediately below the headline announcing the banking bill. The next day, for readers who had not received the extra edition, the Journal carried Aberhart's statement on Page Eight.

[16]Time after time, ministers "officially denied happenings which were subsequently known to be facts." Edmonton MLA Walter Morrish, Calgary Albertan, October 5, 1937.

[17]Edmonton Journal, September 1, 1937.

[18]People's Weekly, October 16, 1937.

[19]Letter from George Ashworth, Peace River, January 20, 1936. Premier's Papers, Archives.

[20]Statement of the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association (Alberta Division) and the Daily Newspapers of Alberta, submitted to the legislature's Agricultural Committee during consideration of the Accurate News and Information Act. Edmonton Journal, October 1, 1937.

[21]Ibid.

[22]An Act to amend and consolidate The Licensing of Trades and Businesses Act, Alberta Legislature, 1937, Third Session.

[23]For incorrectly stating in a column the position of a backbench Social Crediter on legislation, Don Brown of the Journal was declared guilty of a breach of House privileges and ordered detained in Lethbridge jail "during the pleasure of the assembly." However, the arrest warrant was never signed and a day later the House ordered the "release" of the reporter. Edmonton Journal, March 25 and 26, 1938.

[24]The premier himself regularly used unidentified sources to make a point or to raise an issue. In his Sunday broadcasts he would preface a remark with something like "a friend told me..." or "I understand that...."

[25]Calgary Herald, September 15, 1936.

[26]Ibid., January 13, 1936.

[27]Supreme Court Reports (1938), p. 132.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., p. 133.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid., pp. 133-134.

[32]Ibid., p. 144.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Calgary Herald, March 10, 1936.

[36]Jerome A. Barron, "The Constitutional Status of Freedom of Speech and Press in Canada: The History of a Quiet Revolution," in Northwestern University Law Review, vol. 58 (1963-1964) p. 78.

[37]John T. Saywell, "Reservation Revisited: Alberta, 1937," in Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, vol. 27 (August 1961) p. 370.

[38]John Hohenberg, Free Press/Free People: The Best Cause (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 225.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Calgary Albertan, October 1, 1937.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

> Freedom of discussion is essential to enlighten public opinion in a democratic state; it cannot be curtailed without affecting the right of the people to be informed through sources independent of the government concerning matters of public interest.
>
> --Mr. Justice L. A. Cannon[1]

The Accurate News and Information Act was purportedly designed to ensure that Albertans received a factual account of the Social Credit government in their newspapers. Introduced after repreated complaints by Aberhart and his followers that the press misrepresented the administration and was unfair to Social Credit, the legislation was supposedly a corrective measure. Its real objectives, however, were entirely different from what was stated by the government. In forcing newspapers to print official statements, the Aberhart administration sought to establish a new propaganda outlet, one that would cover the province at no cost to the government. Other provisions in the act were meant to give the government control over what the press said about it, thus restricting the debate on public affairs.

This paper has shown that the government's professed motive for introducing such legislation lacked credibility; the administration did not have a supportable case for its charges of misrepresentation and unfairness against the press. It cannot be denied that the government was under constant attack in the press. The newspapers, as economic

and intellectual enterprises, were particularly concerned over the possibility of further damage being done to the economy through attempts to introduce untested and patently unworkable Social Credit measures. However, we have seen that Social Crediters produced scant evidence to indicate the press was presenting a false picture to the Alberta population. And whatever their editorial views, the newspapers had opened their pages to the administration to present its side. The true motives for the press legislation were found elsewhere.

Earlier chapters established that the Social Credit movement, taking its lead from Aberhart, was extremely sensitive to criticism and intolerant of those who disagreed with official policy. Unable to deal with differing views through reasoned argument, Social Crediters chose instead to attack those holding such views. The press, as one of the major critics of Social Credit, was thus a natural target for a narrow-minded and vindictive government determined to "get even" with those it considered enemies. Aberhart wanted revenge on the newspapers not only for what they said about his government but also for the anti-Social Credit barrage of the 1935 election campaign. As well, the press was an obvious scapegoat for the difficulties the government was encountering and its failure to deliver the people from their economic misery, as had been promised. It was easy to blame the press for the government's inability to produce the Social Credit system that was supposed to usher in a new economic era.

The Accurate News and Information Act was also admirably suited to a party and government fervently committed to propagating the Social

Credit doctrine. Aberhart never tired of preaching his message over radio and, as the attempt to purchase the Albertan indicated, he wanted that message carried in the press as well. The press act would have given him this opportunity by forcibly enlisting all newspapers to serve as unpaid carriers of Social Credit statements. Aberhart would then have been in a position to cover virtually the entire province by radio and the press. But if propaganda had been the main motive, the legislation would have stopped at the point where it compelled newspapers to print government messages. The Accurate News and Information Act, however, went far beyond what was required to provide a new propaganda channel.

By demanding identification of those persons who contributed to unflattering stories and critical editorials, and by threatening to stop publication of newspapers which did not comply, the government clearly was attempting to control what was said about the Social Credit administration. The reason it wanted such control was shown to be linked to Social Credit's experience in office. Aberhart and his colleagues strongly resented the unsympathetic treatment of the press at the best of times, but the good times were rare in the government's early years. Day after day, newspapers reported the disappointments and failures of the administration. These stories showed the Aberhart government was unable to deliver the promised economic salvation, and exposed the Social Credit program as just so much wishful thinking. From its own narrow viewpoint, then, the government had an excellent reason for wanting to control the press: to suppress the news and com-

ment that were destroying all lingering illusions about Social Credit.

With this narrow viewpoint, however, the government could not see, or chose to ignore, the wider ramifications of the Accurate News and Information Act. As the Supreme Court of Canada stated in ruling the act ultra vires, Aberhart was attempting to restrict the flow of public debate and discussion that is an integral part of the Canadian system of government. With his authoritarian approach, Aberhart did not appreciate the need for or the value of such debate and discussion. His main concern was protecting the image of his Social Credit regime and ensuring the regime's survival. The Accurate News and Information Act showed that to do this he was willing to sacrifice part of the democratic system.

FOOTNOTES

[1]From the Supreme Court of Canada judgment on the Accurate News and Information Act. Supreme Court Reports (1938), pp. 145-146.

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APPENDIX

AN ACT TO ENSURE THE PUBLICATION OF ACCURATE NEWS AND INFORMATION

1937

(THIRD SESSION)

BILL 9.

An Act to Ensure the Publication of Accurate News and Information.

(Reserved for the Signification of the Governor General's Pleasure—October 5th, 1937.)

WHEREAS it is expedient and in the public interest that the newspapers published in the Province should furnish to the people of the Province statements made by the authority of the Government of the Province as to the true and exact objects of the policy of the Government and as to the hindrances to or difficulties in achieving such objects, to the end that the people may be informed with respect thereto.

Now, Therefore, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, enacts as follows:

1. This Act may be cited as *"The Accurate News and Information Act."*

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

(*a*) "Chairman" means the Chairman of the Board constituted by section 3 of *The Alberta Social Credit Act;*

(*b*) "Newspaper" means a paper containing public news, intelligence or occurrences or remarks or observations thereon, printed for sale and published periodically in parts or numbers at regular intervals not exceeding thirty-one days between the publication of any two of such papers, parts or numbers, and includes a paper printed in order to be made public weekly or oftener, or at intervals not exceeding thirty-one days containing only or principally advertisements, and a paper containing accounts of events occurring within thirty-one days before the date of publication.

3.—(1) Subject to the other provisions of this section, every person who is the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper published in the Province, shall when required so to do by the Chairman, publish in that newspaper any statement furnished by the Chairman which has for its object the correction or amplification of any statement relating to any policy or activity of the Government of the Province published by that newspaper within the next preceding thirty-one days.

(2) Every such statement shall have written upon it a certificate in the following words: "The foregoing statement is published by the direction of the Chairman of The Social Credit Board," which certificate shall be printed at the foot of the statement to which it relates.

(3) Every such statement shall be printed with the type ordinarily used in the printing of the newspaper.

(4) The length of any statement required to be published shall not exceed the length of the statement corrected thereby and such statement shall be given the same prominence as to position, type and space as the statement corrected thereby.

(5) Every requirement by the Chairman for the publication of any statement shall be in writing signed by the Chairman, and shall be deemed to have been duly made upon the receipt of the requirement together with the statements referred to therein at the office or usual place of business of any of the following persons, namely, the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of the newspaper.

(6) Every statement so required to be published in a newspaper shall be submitted in the language used in the publication of such newspaper and shall be published in the next regular issue thereof after the day upon which the requirement for the publication thereof referred to in subsection (5) is received at the office or usual place of business of any of the following persons, namely, the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of the newspaper.

(7) No statement required to be published pursuant to this Act shall contain any notice or other matter the publication of which is required to be made pursuant to any other statute or which is ordinarily published as advertising.

4. Every person who is the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper, shall upon being required so to do by the Chairman in writing, within twenty-four hours after the delivery of such requirement at the office or usual place of business of any of the following persons, namely, the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of the newspaper, make a return in writing setting out every source from which any information emanated, as to any statement contained in any issue of the newspaper published within sixty days of the making of the requirement and the names, addresses and occupations of all persons by whom such information was furnished to the newspaper, and the name and address of the writer of any editorial, article or news item contained in any such issue of the newspaper as aforesaid.

5. No action for libel shall be maintainable on account of the publication of any statement pursuant to this Act against any person who is the proprietor, editor, publisher, manager or printer of the newspaper publishing the same or against any employee of any such person or against any

person on account of any subsequent publication of any such statement.

6. In case the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper has been guilty of any contravention of any of the provisions of this Act the Lieutenant Governor in Council, upon the recommendation of the Chairman, may by order prohibit,—

(*a*) the publication of such newspaper either for a definite time or until further order;

(*b*) the publication in any newspaper of anything written by any person specified in the order;

(*c*) the publication of any information emanating from any person or source specified in the order.

7.—(1) Every person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Act or who makes any default in complying with any requirement made in pursuance of this Act shall be liable to a penalty not to exceed five hundred dollars.

(2) Every person who contravenes any of the provisions of any order in council made pursuant to section 6 of this Act shall in respect of every such contravention be liable to a penalty not to exceed one thousand dollars.

(3) Any penalty which any person is liable to pay pursuant to any provision of this Act shall be recoverable either by suit brought by the Chairman in any court of competent civil jurisdiction, or upon summary conviction upon the information or complaint of the Chairman or of some person authorized in writing by the Chairman to lay such information.

8. This Act shall come into force on the day upon which it is assented to.